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ABSTRACT

This report describes the first 2 years of Connecticut's Jobs First program operation. Chapter 1 describes the following: the policy context; the program's three main features--time limit, earned income disregard, and mandatory "work first" employment services; the evaluation and implementation analysis; and the research sites and target population. Chapter 2 discusses specific challenges that have faced Connecticut Department of Social Services during the first 2 years of Jobs First implementation. It describes the general context, highlighting several issues that have created a challenging environment for implementation; it also addresses specific challenges that arise from the nature of program policies, such as explaining the new policies, reorienting employment services, changing the message: the role of eligibility staff, and developing a pre-time limit review process. Chapter 3 discusses how Jobs First operated in the research sites during the pre-time limit period. It describes the analysis limits, focuses on how the first three challenges identified in chapter 2 have been addressed in the research sites, and looks at these issues from the perspectives of program participants. Chapter 4 examines the early implementation of the Jobs First time limit policy and presents preliminary information on the process that occurs as recipients approach and then reach the time limit. Appendixes include one table and two figures illustrating findings. (YLB)

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JOBS FIRST

Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative

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JOBS FIRST

Early Implementation of Connecticut's Welfare Reform Initiative

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July 1998

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Preface

This report describes the early implementation of Connecticut's Jobs First program, one of the most important state welfare reform programs initiated under federal waivers prior to the passage of the 1996 federal welfare law. The experiences of Connecticut and other early-starting states provide a preview of the likely results of reforms implemented nationwide in response to the new law.

A focus on program implementation is critical because the success or failure of welfare reform is ultimately determined in the day-to-day interactions between staff and clients. Unfortunately, the nitty-gritty reality of implementation is often forgotten when new policies are designed and described to the public.

This report shows that even relatively simple-sounding policies such as time limits on welfare receipt can generate significant operational challenges. It also illustrates how seemingly complementary policies such as time limits and financial work incentives can interact in complex ways. The report finds that Connecticut has made substantial progress in implementing Jobs First, but there have been start-up problems and additional challenges remain in the future.

The State of Connecticut deserves credit for seeking out detailed, objective information on how its welfare reform policies are being implemented; we hope the data in this report are helpful as the Department of Social Services plans the future of Jobs First. We also hope the report helps other states as they struggle with similar challenges over the next few years.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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This report could not have been completed without the contributions of many people at the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) and at MDRC.

Staff in the DSS regional offices in Manchester and New Haven have consistently supported the evaluation and implemented its complex procedures. Managers, supervisors, and line staff in the case maintenance, employment services, and intake units have been open and candid in discussing their experiences with Jobs First over the past two years. Space does not permit us to mention all of the people who have contributed to the study, but special thanks are due Beverly Miller (Manchester) and Robert Lucash, Carol Quinn, and Mark Schwartz (New Haven).

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Richard Hendra analyzed the three-month client survey and Kim Kovath programmed the baseline data. JoAnna Hunter-Manns provided technical assistance with the staff survey analysis and the analysis of time limit outcomes, and Johanna Walter made important contributions to all of the quantitative analyses. Rachel Hitch coordinated the report's production, created many of the tables and figures, and oversaw the fact-checking process. Jennifer Cooper and Deisnel Cardenas assisted with the field research and Ana Ventura helped with fact-checking.

Joel Gordon has overseen the efforts of the information services department. Galina Faberova created data-entry screens for the surveys, and Shirley James, Marguerite Payne, and Joyce Dees obtained data to support the analysis of time limit outcomes. Greg Hoerz and Melisa Diaz oversaw the administration of the three-month client survey.

Patt Pontevolpe and Stephanie Cowell did the word processing. We appreciate the editorial work of Robert Cohen and Richard Steins.

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The Authors

Executive Summary

Connecticut's Jobs First program is a statewide welfare reform initiative that began operating in January 1996. Jobs First was one of the earliest statewide programs to impose a time limit on welfare receipt: Most families are limited to 21 months of cash assistance. The program also includes generous financial work incentives and requires recipients to participate in employment-related services targeted toward rapid job placement. (See Table ES.1.) Jobs First was initiated under waivers of federal welfare rules that were granted before the passage of the 1996 federal welfare law; thus, the program's experience may provide important lessons on the likely results of welfare reforms implemented across the country in response to the new law.

This report has been prepared as part of a large-scale evaluation of Jobs First being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). The evaluation is funded under a contract with the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) — the agency that administers Jobs First — and with support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Ford Foundation, and the Smith Richardson Foundation. MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than two decades' experience designing and evaluating social policy initiatives. The study focuses on two of the state's welfare offices — New Haven and Manchester — which include about one-fourth of the state's welfare caseload.

The report describes Jobs First's implementation in the research sites during roughly the first two years of program operations, from early 1996 to early 1998.[1] It focuses primarily on the "pre-time limit period" — the period before Jobs First participants reached the 21-month time limit — but also includes early information on the process that occurs when individuals approach and then reach the time limit. Recipients began to reach that point in late 1997. The report does *not* present data on whether Jobs First has generated *changes* in recipients' employment or welfare receipt patterns, income, or other measures relative to the welfare system it replaced. The first such data will be presented in an interim report scheduled for 1999. The study's final report is scheduled for 2001.

Summary of the Key Findings

Jobs First has generated important changes in the message and practices of Connecticut's welfare system. For example, the state's welfare-to-work program has shifted its emphasis toward rapid job placement and away from education and training; welfare eligibility workers report that they are now more likely to talk with clients about issues related to employment and self-sufficiency; and DSS has put in place a process to review large numbers of cases as they reach the time limit in order to determine whether extensions should be granted.

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[1] The evaluation is occurring in two of DSS's 15 regional offices. The report often refers to these locations as the "research sites."

At the same time, Jobs First has experienced some start-up problems. In part, these difficulties reflect the far-reaching nature of the program and the fact that most dramatic policy changes encounter problems in their early stages. In addition, Jobs First has been implemented in a challenging environment. For example, unlike many of the other welfare reforms initiated under waivers, Jobs First was implemented statewide from its inception and with little time for advance planning. Finally, Jobs First has gone into effect during a period of extraordinary flux in Connecticut's social welfare system: DSS managers and staff have been called upon to implement a host of new initiatives during the past two to three years.

Table ES.1

Key Features of Connecticut's Jobs First Program

21-month time limit on cash assistance	Certain families exempt from time limit (e.g., families in which every adult is incapacitated, age 60 or older, or a caretaker relative who is not included in the grant). Six-month extensions for families who make a good-faith effort to find employment but have income below the welfare payment standard (the maximum grant for their family size) when they reach the time limit (or at any point thereafter). Extensions also granted when circumstances beyond the recipient's control prevent her from working. No limit on the number of extensions.
Enhanced earned income disregard	All earned income disregarded (i.e., not counted) in calculating monthly cash grants (and Food Stamps) as long as earnings are below the federal poverty level (currently $1,111 for a family of three).
Mandatory "work first" employment services	Required participation in employment services targeted to rapid job placement. Most recipients begin by looking for work, either on their own or through structured Job Search Skills Training (JSST) programs. Education and training reserved for clients who fail to find jobs after lengthy upfront job search activities. Strong sanctions for failure to comply with employment services mandates: grant reduced 20 percent for first instance of noncompliance, 35 percent for second instance; canceled for three months after third instance.
Other policy changes	***Partial family cap:*** Smaller benefit increase for children conceived while mother received welfare. ***Extended transitional benefits:*** Two years of transitional Medicaid coverage for recipients who leave welfare while employed or who subsequently become employed within six months. Some child care assistance may be provided if income is below 75 percent of state median. ***Child support changes:*** All child support collected for children receiving welfare given to custodial parent; first $100 per month disregarded in grant calculation.

The report focuses on four key tasks that DSS has faced in implementing Jobs First and describes how these issues have been addressed in the research sites:

Explaining the time limit and the financial incentives. The success of Jobs First depends heavily on communication: The time limit and the financial incentives cannot have their full desired impacts unless clients are aware of and understand the policies. However, it is a challenging task to explain dramatic new policies to welfare recipients, particularly recipients who have received benefits for a long period under the old rules.

MDRC's site visits and a survey of staff indicate that workers routinely inform and remind clients about the time limit and the incentive, which is an enhanced "earned income disregard" — a rule change that allows working clients to retain their entire welfare grant as long as their earnings are below the federal poverty level. Data from a small survey of clients indicate that most clients are aware of these policies. At the same time, most Jobs First clients are not required to have frequent contact with staff, and workers' large caseloads prevent them from contacting many clients proactively. Thus, there are relatively few opportunities for staff to aggressively market the new policies or to work with clients to decide how best to respond. Moreover, there appears to be some variation in the way staff describe the policies to clients.

Reorienting employment services. Jobs First seeks to bring about fundamental changes in Connecticut's employment services for welfare recipients. It aims to convert a largely voluntary program with a strong emphasis on education and training into a mandatory program focused on immediate job placement. In addition, Jobs First aims to greatly expand the number of clients served without increasing the number of DSS staff.

The information collected to date suggests that Jobs First has generated key changes in employment services. As intended, most clients start with "up-front" job search activities, and employment services staff report focusing much more attention on the goal of employment. Moreover, staff report that clients are more likely to be sanctioned (i.e., to have their benefits reduced or canceled) for failing to cooperate with employment services mandates.

At the same time, there have been difficulties in monitoring the attendance of clients referred to some contracted providers of employment services. In addition, with resources limited, employed clients have been given low priority, even if they are working in low-wage, part-time jobs that would qualify them for an extension when they reach the time limit.

Changing the message. Jobs First seeks to shift the welfare system's focus from income maintenance to self-sufficiency. Welfare eligibility workers, the key contact points between recipients and the system, are critical to any such effort to change the system's overall "message." Jobs First aims to facilitate this change by reducing the extent to which staff need to monitor clients' income. (Such monitoring is less critical because Jobs First's earned income disregard is structured so that a client's grant amounts are generally not affected by her earnings.)[2]

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[2] Feminine pronouns are used throughout this report because the vast majority of Jobs First clients are women.

Most eligibility staff say that, under the new system, they are more likely to discuss topics related to employment and self-sufficiency during their contacts with clients; in addition, many staff say they are doing more to assist clients in moving toward self-sufficiency. Staff, however, have relatively limited contact with many of their clients, and many have expressed ambivalence about the decreased monitoring of their clients' income. They believe that this less intense monitoring may result in incorrect benefit amounts (e.g., when clients have earned income that exceeds the poverty level).

Creating and implementing a pre-time limit review process. Like many other early time limit programs, Jobs First includes special protections for clients who "play by the rules" but cannot find jobs. As shown in Table 1, six-month extensions are granted to clients who make a good-faith effort to find a job, but have family income below the welfare payment standard ($543 per month for a typical family of three) when they reach the time limit or at any point thereafter. Extensions are also granted when circumstances beyond a recipient's control prevent her from working. The critical challenge in implementing a policy of this kind is to create a review process that is flexible enough to account for individual circumstances but uniform enough to ensure that clients in similar situations receive similar treatment. Moreover, the process must be streamlined enough so that large numbers of cases can be reviewed without placing an undue burden on staff.

Preliminary data indicate that just over one-fourth of early Jobs First enrollees received benefits continuously (or nearly continuously) for 21 months and reached the time limit. The others either left welfare, at least temporarily, or were granted an exemption that stopped their time limit clock. Many of these clients may reach the time limit eventually.

Of those who reached the time limit, about half initially received a six-month extension. A large majority of the extensions were granted because the client had income under the payment standard and was deemed to have made a good-faith effort to find employment. Most of the clients who were *denied* extensions had income over the payment standard. Very few clients with income below the payment standard were denied extensions (a denial of extension would occur only if the client had failed to make a good-faith effort and was not facing special circumstances that interfered with her ability to work). Some clients, however, had their benefits canceled because they failed to show up for the interview at which extensions are determined; thus, DSS could not ascertain their income.

It is important to note, however, that the statuses at the end of the time limit are not necessarily permanent. Some of the clients who were initially denied an extension were subsequently granted one (usually because their income dropped) and were off assistance for only one to three months. Conversely, some of the clients who received extensions were off welfare only a few months later, in some cases because it was determined that they failed to comply with employment-related requirements during the extension period.

It appears that staff have implemented the review process as it is intended to operate. However, it seems clear that some of the clients who were deemed to have made a good-faith effort were in fact not carefully monitored during their time in the program. Others were thought to have been employed — and thus were not targeted for employment services — when in fact they had failed to inform DSS that they had lost a job. (Under Jobs First's unusual earned income disregard, clients' grants are usually not affected when they lose a job.)

Because only a small number of clients with income below the payment standard have had their benefits canceled, there have been relatively few referrals to the "safety net" component set up to ensure that such families' basic needs are met.

Implications of the Findings

Several notes of caution are necessary before drawing any broad conclusions from the findings in this report:

- The findings reflect the way Jobs First operated during its start-up period, and it seems quite likely that the program will look different in the future.
- This report focuses on only two research sites. DSS's regional offices exercise some discretion over the specifics of program implementation, particularly with regard to employment services. Thus, Jobs First may look different in other parts of the state.
- This is a preliminary analysis based on a few data sources. The issues discussed in this document will be examined more fully in the interim report, scheduled for 1999.
- Most important, it is impossible to say whether any of the implementation issues discussed in this report will affect Jobs First's ability to achieve its main goals of increasing employment and reducing welfare dependence.

With these cautionary notes in mind, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions from these results.

Implications of limited staffing levels. Jobs First reflects a distinctive approach to welfare reform. Some other programs devote substantial resources to hiring additional staff so that case workers can work intensively with recipients and closely monitor their activities. Jobs First relies more heavily on incentives and messages. It imposes a short time limit to create a sense of urgency and generous financial incentives to clearly make work pay, but it includes relatively few specific requirements for recipients and provides few special services. Staffing levels have not been increased, and the program is structured so that staff and clients do not necessarily interact frequently.

It is too early to say whether Jobs First's approach will prove to be an effective way to increase employment and reduce welfare dependence. From an operational perspective, the approach has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, while Jobs First's financial incentives may prove to be costly, its administrative costs are likely to be fairly low. Thus, relative to some other programs, Jobs First is likely to direct a greater share of resources to low-income working families rather than to staff salaries.

On the other hand, the fact that many recipients do not interact much with staff means that there are relatively few opportunities for workers to help clients understand how they might best respond to the new rules. This situation magnifies the need for staff training, not just on rules and regulations, but also on how to market and discuss the new policies.

In addition, large caseloads have contributed to some difficulties case workers face in monitoring participants' activities, and have also forced employment services staff to place a low priority on clients working in part-time, low-wage jobs. Reduced monitoring of clients' income — along with the unusual structure of the financial incentive — has made it difficult to determine if clients are still holding jobs they had reported earlier. Some clients who have lost jobs may not be targeted for employment help. DSS is currently planning to implement a new staffing structure in which eligibility and employment functions are combined in a single staff position; this may facilitate tighter monitoring. Once again, however, staff training is likely to be critical to making this new position work.

The time limit review process. As noted earlier, the vast majority of cases reaching the time limit so far followed one of two paths: They were denied an extension because they were "over income," or they were granted an extension because they had income under the payment standard and were deemed to have made a good-faith effort to find a job. Thus, while a large number of clients have had their benefits canceled at the time limit, the vast majority of these individuals had jobs.

Although implementation of the pre-time limit review process has been relatively straightforward so far, several issues seem likely to emerge in the future. For example:

- It is not clear how many of the clients who were denied extensions because they had income over the payment standard will come back to request them later if they lose their jobs. Data in this report indicate that this is already starting to occur.

- As noted earlier, many of the clients who received extensions were not closely monitored during the pre-time limit period. However, growing attention is likely to focus on these cases during their extension periods, and, as monitoring intensifies, it is likely that staff will identify more and more clients who are failing to attend required employment activities or who lose jobs. When such identification occurs, staff will need to make a difficult decision about whether there is good cause for the noncooperation; if not, the client's grant could be canceled permanently. Staff may begin to encounter more "gray areas" — situations in which clients are experiencing problems that are not severe enough to warrant an exemption, but which may be interfering with their ability to cooperate. Put simply, the concept of "good-faith effort" may become less clear cut.

- The number of clients with income below the payment standard who lose their grants is likely to grow over time. Many clients will likely be terminated during an extension period or, if not, will be denied a second extension. This trend will magnify the need to clarify the parameters of the safety net component.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Connecticut's Jobs First program is a statewide welfare reform initiative that began operating in January 1996. Jobs First was one of the earliest statewide programs to impose a time limit on welfare receipt: Most families are limited to 21 months of cash assistance. The program also includes generous financial work incentives and requires recipients to participate in employment-related services targeted toward rapid job placement. Jobs First was initiated under waivers of federal welfare rules that were granted before the passage of the 1996 federal welfare law; thus, the program's experience may provide important lessons on the likely results of welfare reforms implemented across the country in response to the new law.

This report has been prepared as part of a large-scale evaluation of Jobs First being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). The evaluation is funded under a contract with the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) — the agency that administers Jobs First — and with support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Ford Foundation, and the Smith Richardson Foundation. The study, which focuses on two of the state's welfare offices — New Haven and Manchester — began in 1996 and is scheduled to end in 2001. MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than two decades' experience designing and evaluating programs and policies directed at low-income individuals, families, and communities.

This report is the second publication in the Jobs First evaluation. The first, a brief paper completed in early 1997, examined the implementation of Jobs First in the research sites during its first year of operations.[1] This report extends the analysis of Jobs First's implementation by looking at a longer period — roughly the first two years of program operations — and drawing on a broader set of data sources. It focuses primarily on the "pre-time limit period" — the period before Jobs First participants reach the 21-month time limit — but also includes early information on the process that occurs as individuals approach and then reach the time limit. (Recipients began to reach that point in late 1997.) The report does *not* present information about whether Jobs First has generated *changes* in participants' employment and welfare receipt patterns, family income, or other outcomes, relative to outcomes under the traditional welfare system. The first such data will be presented in an interim report scheduled for 1999.

I. The Policy Context of Jobs First

Between 1993 and mid-1996, more than 40 states were granted waivers of federal welfare rules that enabled them to implement a variety of measures designed to increase employment and self-sufficiency among welfare recipients. Although the 1996 federal welfare law made major changes in the structure and funding of public assistance programs, most of the specific policies that the law encourages states to adopt were already being implemented as part of state waiver initiatives. For example, while the 1996 law restricts states from using federal funds to assist most families for more than five years (and allows states to set shorter time limits), more than 30 states had previously obtained waivers to implement some form of time limit in at least part of the state. Thus, the experiences of state waiver programs provide an early look at the likely results of the new law.

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[1] Mary Andes and Dan Bloom, *Early Data on the Implementation of Connecticut's Jobs First Program* (New York: MDRC, 1997).

Connecticut's Jobs First program is one of the most important initiatives implemented under waivers. The program's 21-month time limit is one of the shortest in the nation, and the program is also one of the first to impose a time limit in relatively large cities such as New Haven, Hartford, and Bridgeport. Most of the other early time limit programs were initially implemented as pilot programs in relatively small counties or regions of states. Many observers believe that welfare reform initiatives will encounter their biggest test in large urban areas.

In addition, Jobs First includes a financial work incentive that is both very generous and distinctive in its design: All earned income is disregarded (i.e., not counted) in calculating recipients' monthly welfare grants as long as their earnings are below the federal poverty level. Prior to mid-1996, more than 40 states received waivers to increase the amount of earned income that is disregarded in calculating welfare grants.[2] Jobs First will provide important new evidence on earned income disregards per se and on the complex interaction between disregards and time limits.

II. The Jobs First Program Model

Under Jobs First, Connecticut's Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program was replaced by a new program, Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). The key features of the new program are:

- **A time limit.** Jobs First limits families to a cumulative total of 21 months of cash assistance receipt. Certain families, such as those in which every adult is incapacitated, are exempt from the time limit. (So long as the exemption applies, months of benefit receipt do not count toward the time limit.) In addition, recipients may receive (renewable) 6-month extensions of the time limit under certain circumstances.

- **An earned income disregard.** To encourage and reward work, all earned income is disregarded (i.e., not counted) in calculating recipients' cash grants (and Food Stamp benefits) as long as their earned income is below the federal poverty level. (Unearned income is counted against the grant.) Recipients lose their entire cash grant if their earnings are at or above the poverty level.

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[2] The 1996 welfare law eliminated the federal rules that previously governed the treatment of earnings in the calculation of welfare grants. Thus, states can now set their own rules without having to obtain federal approval.

- **Mandatory "work first" employment services.** Jobs First participants are required to participate in employment services targeted to rapid job placement.

Jobs First also includes an array of other changes in traditional welfare rules. For example, the program imposes a partial "family cap": When a recipient gives birth to a child who was conceived while she received welfare, her benefits are increased by about half as much as they would have been under prior rules. In addition, Jobs First participants receive two years of transitional Medicaid coverage after leaving welfare while employed (as opposed to the one year of coverage provided under prior law).[3]

Finally, all child support collected on behalf of children receiving assistance is given directly to the custodial parent, and the first $100 per month is disregarded in calculating the grant amount. (Under prior rules, the child support disregard was $50, and the recipient did not receive a separate check for the full amount of child support; thus, recipients may not have known how much support had been paid.) This change is designed to make it easier for recipients to see how much support is collected for their children, and to provide a greater financial incentive to cooperate with child support enforcement efforts.

In addition to these rule changes, the state reduced basic cash assistance benefit levels by 6.5 percent when it implemented Jobs First.

The three main features of Jobs First are discussed in more detail below.

A. The Jobs First Time Limit

The basic design of the Jobs First time limit is straightforward: Each month that a family receives cash assistance after entering the program counts toward the 21-month limit. (Months of assistance that the family may have received before entering Jobs First do not count.)[4] Once the 21 months are exhausted, the family's cash grant is discontinued; eligibility for Food Stamps and Medicaid is not directly affected by the time limit.

The time limit policy includes two types of exceptions:

- **Exemptions**. A family is exempt from the time limit if all adults in the family are exempt from mandatory participation in employment-related activities;[5] months of assistance received while an exemption applies do not count toward the limit. Exemptions, which are often temporary, may be granted at any point after a family enters Jobs First. (Families that are exempt from the time limit remain eligible for the enhanced earned income disregard, discussed below.)

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[3] More specifically, transitional Medicaid is provided for two years to families who are employed at the point their TFA benefits are discontinued (or who become employed within six months of losing eligibility for benefits), or who lose eligibility on account of child support income.

[4] The time limit clock starts with the first full month of benefit receipt following enrollment.

[5] An adult recipient is exempt from mandatory participation if she or he is: age 60 or older; caring for a child under age one, if the child was not conceived while the parent received welfare; incapacitated or caring full-time for an incapacitated household member; pregnant or postpartum if a physician determines that she is unable to work; a caretaker relative who is not included in the welfare grant; or unemployable. (Recipients are considered to be unemployable if they are age 40 or older, unemployed, have not completed grade 6, and have not worked for more than six consecutive months in the past five years.) Exemptions for unemployability are not determined until the participant has received benefits for 20 months.

- **Extensions**. Recipients who reach the time limit may receive six-month extensions of their benefits if they have made a good-faith effort to find employment but have family income below the welfare payment standard (the maximum monthly grant for their family size) when they reach the time limit, or at any point thereafter.[6] (Table 1.1 shows the payment standard for several family sizes.) Extensions can also be granted if there are circumstances beyond a recipient's control that prevent her from working (even if she has not made a good-faith effort to find employment).[7] There is no limit on the number of extensions a family may receive. Chapter 4 discusses the process that is used to determine which families receive extensions.

Table 1.1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) Payment Standard and Federal Poverty Level, by Family Size (1997)

	Family Unit Size		
Monthly Income Level	2	3	4
TFA payment standard	$443	$543	$639
Federal poverty level	$884	$1,111	$1,338

SOURCES: Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) payment standard information from Connecticut Department of Social Services, Exit Interview Manual; federal poverty levels from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines for 1997.

Finally, specific services are targeted to families whose cases are closed when the time limit is reached.[8] Recipients whose cases are closed and whose income is above the payment standard may receive up to one year of rental assistance.[9] Families whose income is *below* the payment standard but whose cases are closed (because it is determined that the parent[s] did not make a good-faith effort to find employment) are eligible for safety net services: Nonprofit organizations have been contracted to link these families with existing community services to ensure that their basic needs are met; if community resources are not available, the contracted agencies may provide vouchers to help the family pay for food, clothing, or shelter.

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[6] A $90 work expense allowance is disregarded for each working person in calculating the monthly income of families reaching the time limit.

[7] "Circumstances beyond one's control" are defined as "events that happen to the family which are of such magnitude that they reasonably prevent a mandatory recipient from working or working more hours when an extension is requested. Events include, but are not limited to: prolonged illness, disaster such as flood or fire, loss of housing, and domestic violence."

[8] The report uses the terms "discontinued," "closed," and "terminated" interchangeably when discussing the ending of recipients' grants at the time limit.

[9] Funding for this program is limited; thus, rental assistance is not available to all eligible families.

B. Enhanced Earned Income Disregard

The Jobs First earned income disregard may be the most generous policy of its type implemented in any state. Table 1.1 shows the federal poverty level for several family sizes for 1997. As the table indicates, a single parent with two children can earn up to $1,110 per month (one dollar below the poverty level) without losing any of her cash assistance or Food Stamps (assuming she has no other income). Figure 1.1 shows how many hours per week this parent could work at various hourly wage rates without losing her grant. For example, it shows that if the parent earned $6.25 per hour, she could work 40 hours per week and have all of her earnings disregarded. Because of the disregard, a large proportion of the TFA recipients who go to work continue to receive cash assistance; this has helped to bring about an unprecedented increase in the percentage of the TFA caseload who are working — more than 45 percent according to recent statewide data. Eventually, the Jobs First evaluation will show the extent to which Jobs First has increased employment overall (as opposed to simply increasing the likelihood that employed people will receive welfare).

Figure 1.2 illustrates how the disregard affects working recipients' total income. The figure shows this in two ways. First, it compares a working recipient's total income under Jobs First with her income under Connecticut's prior welfare rules.[10] For example, the figure shows that a parent with two children working 20 hours per week at $6.25 per hour has dramatically higher total income — $363 more per month — under Jobs First than under prior rules. A parent working 40 hours per week at the same wage has $689 more in total monthly income than under prior rules. (This difference is particularly significant because Connecticut's prior welfare rules already provided a stronger work incentive than the rules in effect in many other states.)[11]

Second, the figure shows that parents have much more income if they work than if they do not work. If the parent in the example did not work at all, she would receive $784 per month in combined TFA and Food Stamp benefits. If she worked 20 hours per week, her total monthly income would rise by $716, counting the monthly value of the federal earned income tax credit. (In reality, the vast majority of families receive the EITC in a lump sum at tax time.) If she worked 40 hours per week, her income would rise by $1,286 per month compared with not working. These figures do not account for any added expenses the parent would incur by going to work (her child care would be subsidized while on welfare, but she might incur other costs).

Of course, the disregard only helps parents while they receive welfare. If a parent reaches the time limit and has income over the payment standard, she will lose all of her cash assistance and

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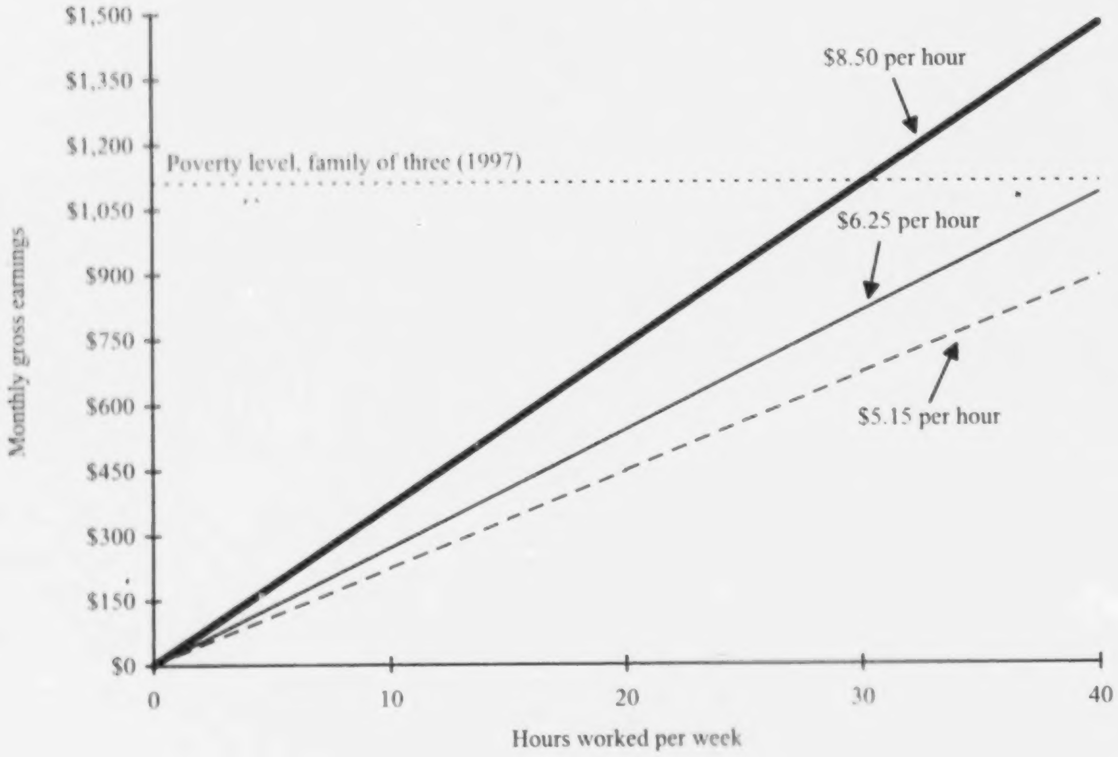
[10] More specifically, the figure compares income under Jobs First with income under the rules that apply to the AFDC group for the Jobs First evaluation (discussed below). The 1995 benefit reduction applies to the AFDC group.

[11] Since early 1994, Connecticut has used "fill-the-gap" budgeting, a complex formula that allows recipients to retain more of their benefits (relative to standard federal rules) when they go to work.

Figure 1.1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Monthly Gross Earnings at Various Hourly Wage Rates, by Hours Worked per Week, in Relation to the Federal Poverty Level (1997)

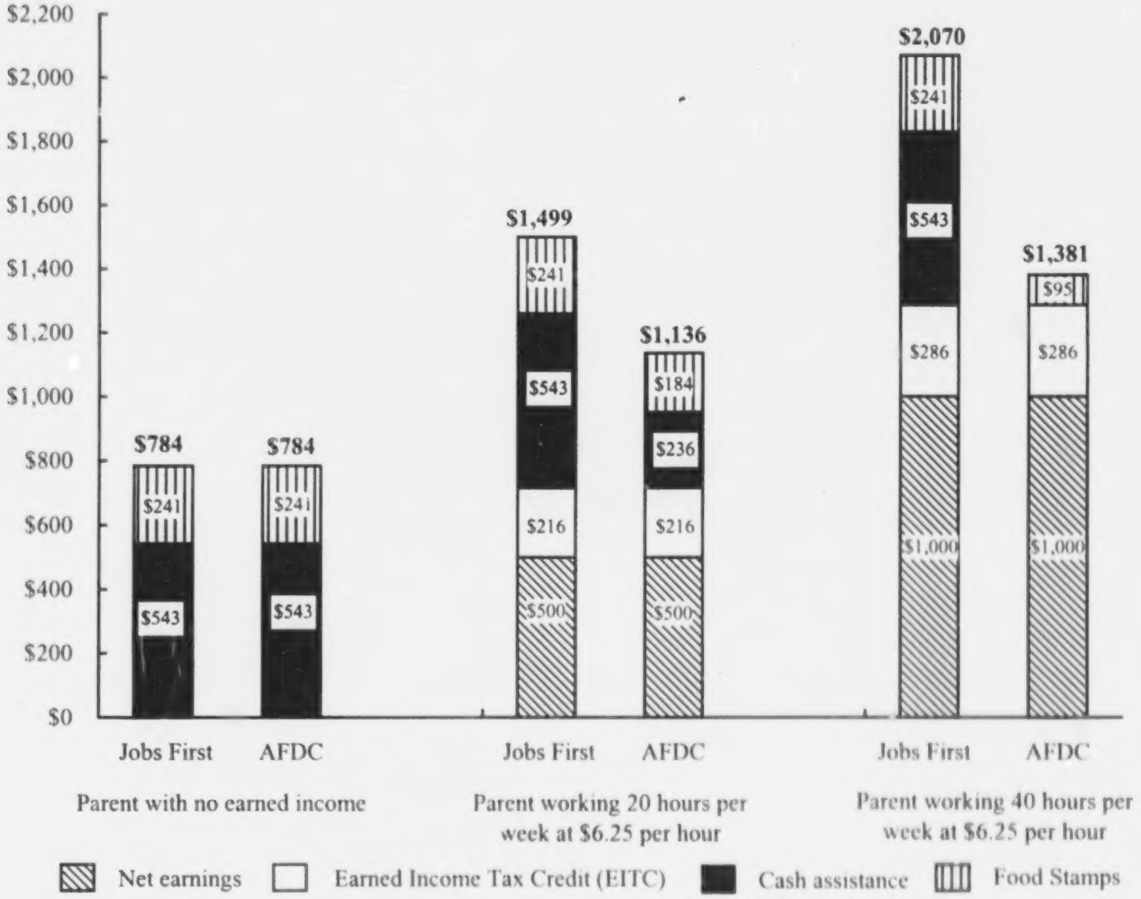


SOURCE: MDRC calculations using standard hourly wages, federal poverty level from 1997 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.

Figure 1.2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Monthly Family Income at Selected Levels of Employment for a Single Parent with Two Children Under Jobs First and AFDC



SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on AFDC/TFA, Food Stamp, and federal and State of Connecticut income tax rules for January through June 1997.

NOTES: Calculations do not account for work-related expenses and assume the parent has no income from sources not shown (e.g., child support, SSI).

The Food Stamp calculation assumes a monthly rental expense of $366. This calculation disregards 70 percent of net income, which includes the TFA grant but excludes a $134 standard deduction and up to $250 of excess shelter costs. For clients in the Jobs First group, all earned income is disregarded. For clients in the AFDC group, 20 percent of earned income is disregarded.

The Jobs First cash assistance calculation disregards all earned income. For clients in the AFDC group, the cash assistance calculation disregards $120 in earned income (in accordance with rules for the 5th to 12th month of employment), and applies "fill-the-gap" budgeting rules.

The EITC amount reflects 1/12 of the total annual credit, although most families receive the credit in an annual lump sum.

Monthly net earnings are calculated by subtracting applicable payroll taxes from gross earnings. Federal and state income taxes do not apply at these income levels.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in the calculation of sums and differences.

probably see her Food Stamp grant decline as well (this is discussed further in Chapter 4). Nevertheless, the disregard provides recipients with a substantial incentive to enter the workforce. Once working, they may be able to gain experience that will allow them to increase their hours and wages by the time they reach the time limit. Moreover, the large income supplement made possible by the disregard provides a cushion that might allow the parent to save some money or buy a more reliable car. Indeed, Jobs First also allows recipients to accumulate more assets and to own more valuable cars (relative to prior welfare rules) without losing eligibility for assistance. In addition, as noted earlier, Jobs First participants receive two years of transitional Medicaid coverage after leaving welfare while employed.

C. "Work First" Employment Services

As noted earlier, Jobs First's employment services are designed to move recipients quickly into jobs. In most cases, participants must begin by looking for a job, either on their own or through a group activity that teaches job-seeking and job-holding skills. Education and training are generally reserved for recipients who are unable to find jobs through lengthy upfront job search activities.

Recipients who do not comply with employment services requirements and are found not to have "good cause" can be sanctioned by having their welfare grants reduced or temporarily canceled. A recipient's cash grant is reduced by 20 percent for three months in response to the first instance of noncompliance, and by 35 percent for three months in response to the second instance. A third instance results in cancellation of the entire grant for three months. (The same penalties apply to recipients who quit jobs without "good cause" or are fired for willful misconduct.)[12]

III. The Jobs First Evaluation

The Jobs First evaluation was initially required as a condition of the federal waivers that allowed Connecticut to operate the program. Then, in 1997, Connecticut received enhanced federal funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support continuation of their ongoing welfare reform evaluation. (The state later received a second federal grant to expand the study to examine Jobs First's impacts on children.) Additional support is provided by the Smith Richardson Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

The study has three major components:

- **Impact analysis**. This part of the study will provide estimates of the changes Jobs First generates in employment rates and earnings, rates and amounts of welfare receipt, family income, the extent of welfare dependency, child well-being, and other outcomes, relative to outcomes under the welfare system that preceded it. In order to conduct this analysis, during 1996 more than 6,000 welfare applicants and recipients in the two research sites were assigned, at random, to one of two groups: the Jobs First group (subject to the policies described above), or the AFDC group (subject to the prior welfare rules).[13] MDRC will study the members of these two groups for four to five years using surveys and computerized administrative records; any differences that emerge between the groups during this follow-up period (for example, in employment rates) will be attributable to Jobs First.

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[12] The length of the penalty for the second instance of noncompliance was six months until mid-1997. This same system of percentage sanctions also applied to noncooperation with child support enforcement mandates until mid-1997. Since that time, families who do not cooperate with child support requirements are ineligible for assistance until they comply.

- **Implementation analysis**. This component of the study examines how Jobs First is operated by staff in the research sites. It assesses whether Jobs First's policies have translated into concrete changes in the day-to-day operations of the welfare system and identifies obstacles that have been encountered. This information is necessary in order to understand the impact results, and may also help DSS identify ways to improve the program's performance.
- **Benefit-cost analysis**. This analysis uses data from the impact study, along with fiscal data, to compare the financial benefits and costs generated by Jobs First for both taxpayers and eligible families.

This report focuses on the implementation analysis only; it does *not* present data on whether Jobs First is generating changes in participants' outcomes relative to traditional AFDC, nor does it refer much to the experiences of AFDC group members. The first data from the impact analysis will be presented in an interim report scheduled for 1999; that report will also include the results of a survey of approximately 800 Jobs First and AFDC group members. Because long-term follow-up information is essential to understanding Jobs First's impacts, final impact results and results of the benefit-cost analysis will be presented in the final report, scheduled for 2001. (A companion document will describe the program's impact on children.)

IV. The Research Sites and the Target Population

A. The Research Sites

DSS operates its programs through 15 regional offices, each serving a number of the state's 169 towns and cities. As noted earlier, the Jobs First evaluation focuses on two of these DSS offices: New Haven and Manchester. Table 1.2 provides some basic information about the two research sites, which were selected in part because they represent two quite different environments.

The New Haven regional office serves about 20 percent of the statewide TFA caseload — just over 9,000 cases in early 1998. The office covers 15 municipalities, but its caseload is heavily concentrated in the city of New Haven, the third largest city in the state. New Haven is one of

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[13] Certain features of Jobs First, such as the 6.5 percent benefit reduction, did not require waivers; they apply to both groups.

Table 1.2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Selected Demographic and Economic Characteristics of the Two Jobs First Evaluation Research Sites and the State of Connecticut

Characteristic	Manchester[a]	New Haven[b]	State of Connecticut
Total population[c] (1996)	298,035	469,940	3,274,238
Demographic information on largest city/town in district[d]			
Population (1996)	49,430	123,893	N/A
Race/ethnicity (1990) (%)			
White, non-Hispanic	92.0	49.0	83.8
Black, non-Hispanic	3.7	35.0	7.9
Hispanic[e]	2.4	13.2	6.5
Other	1.9	2.8	1.8
Economic information on largest city/town in district[d]			
Estimated per capita income[f] (1996) ($)	29,657	21,884	33,875
Median household income (1990) ($)	40,290	25,811	41,721
Average number of employed persons			
December 1995	26,100	49,937	1,604,564
December 1996	26,064	50,784	1,618,648
December 1997	26,484	51,360	1,641,977
Unemployment rate (%)			
December 1995	5.4	6.4	5.4
December 1996	5.6	7.1	5.4
December 1997	3.9	5.3	4.2
Poverty rate[g] (1990) (%)	3.9	21.3	6.0
Welfare caseload information for district			
Total TFA active assistance cases			
January 1996	3,664	10,628	57,753
January 1998	2,828	9,333	47,660
Percentage of state TFA caseload (1998)	5.9	19.6	N/A

(continued)

Table 1.2 (continued)

SOURCES: City/town and state-level demographic information, income data, and poverty rates from State of Connecticut website, Dept. of Economic and Community Development (www.state.ct.us/ecd); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census website (www.census.gov); and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis website (www.bea.gov). Unemployment rates and employed population from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website (www.stats.bls.gov). TFA caseload data from Connecticut Department of Social Services.

NOTES: N/A indicates that data are not applicable.

[a] The Manchester district office serves the municipalities of Andover, Bolton, East Hartford, East Windsor, Ellington, Enfield, Glastonbury, Hebron, Manchester, Marlborough, Somers, South Windsor, Stafford, Tolland, and Vernon.

[b] The New Haven district office serves the municipalities of Ansonia, Bethany, Branford, Derby, East Haven, Hamden, Milford, New Haven, North Branford, North Haven, Orange, Seymour, Shelton, West Haven, and Woodbridge.

[c] "Total population" of the research sites means the population of those municipalities served by the corresponding Department of Social Services (DSS) offices.

[d] Manchester town is the largest municipality in the area served by the Manchester DSS office. New Haven city is the largest municipality in the area served by the New Haven office. East Hartford and Enfield, in the district of Manchester, have populations only slightly smaller than the population of Manchester; populations (1996): East Hartford = 47,985, Enfield = 45,187. The second largest city-town in the New Haven district is West Haven; population (1996) = 52,172.

The demographic and economic information on East Hartford differs considerably from that for Manchester in the following ways: race/ethnicity distribution (1990): white, non-Hispanic = 83.4%; black, non-Hispanic = 8.1%; Hispanic = 6.0%; other = 2.5%; per capita income (1996) = $25,416; unemployment rate (12/95) = 6.9%, (12/96) = 7.0%, (12/97) = 5.2%; poverty rate (1990) = 5.4%. Enfield's demographic and economic information is comparable to that for Manchester.

[e] Hispanic persons may be of any race.

[f] The U.S. per capita average for 1996 was $24,426. Connecticut's per capita income was then the highest in the United States.

[g] Poverty rate is defined as the total percentage of persons below the Federal poverty level, based on 1989 reported income.

the poorer cities in the U.S.; as Table 1.2 shows, slightly more than 20 percent of the city's residents lived below the federal poverty line in 1990, and its per capita income in 1996 was far below the state median. (Connecticut's statewide per capita income is the highest in the U.S.) Although New Haven's unemployment rate has declined (along with the national rate) over the past few years, it has yet to reach the lower statewide levels.

The Manchester office (officially called a suboffice) serves a more suburban area, near Hartford. The 15 municipalities served by the office accounted for about 2,800 TFA cases in early 1998, about 6 percent of the statewide caseload. The three largest towns served by the office, Manchester, East Hartford, and Enfield, each have a population of nearly 50,000, although more than one-third of the TFA caseload is concentrated in East Hartford. While Manchester's economic statistics have largely mirrored those of the state as a whole for the past three years, East Hartford has experienced less favorable conditions. For example, in late 1996, when Manchester's unemployment rate closely matched Connecticut's average rate, unemployment in East Hartford was considerably higher (7.0 percent).

B. The Jobs First Target Population

As discussed earlier, the Jobs First evaluation will eventually estimate the program's impact by comparing the experiences of two groups of people: the Jobs First group and the AFDC group. People who applied for cash assistance during 1996 in either of the research sites were assigned to one or the other group when they came to the DSS office to submit an application.[14] Individuals who were already receiving welfare when Jobs First began were randomly assigned when they came to the office for an eligibility redetermination.[15] If an individual was assigned to the Jobs First group and was not exempt from the time limit, her "clock" started ticking with the first full month of benefits received after random assignment.

Just before individuals were assigned to the groups, staff completed a one-page Background Information Form (BIF) through a brief interview with each client. Table 1.3 shows selected information obtained from the BIF for the roughly 5,500 single-parent cases for whom a BIF was completed and who went through the random assignment process, thus entering the study's "research sample" (the figures include both the Jobs First and AFDC groups).[16] These data provide a snapshot of individuals' characteristics at the point they entered the study.

The Jobs First research sample is unusual because it represents virtually the entire welfare population in the research sites. In most other studies, some categories of cases — such as those who are likely to be exempt from the policy being tested — are excluded from the study and do not go through the random assignment process. In Connecticut, decisions about exemptions were

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[14] To control the workload for local staff, only half the people who applied for benefits between January and July 1996 went through the random assignment process; the rest were placed directly into Jobs First. Beginning on August 1, all applicants were randomly assigned.

[15] Several thousand people who had been previously randomly assigned for a discontinued study of Connecticut's previous welfare reform were not so assigned again; they were placed directly into Jobs First when they showed up for redetermination or to reapply for benefits.

[16] The table does not include 220 single-parent cases for whom a BIF is missing, or the 364 two-parent cases who went through the random assignment process.

Table 1.3

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Selected Characteristics of Single-Parent Research Sample Members at the Time of Random Assignment, by Site

Characteristic	Manchester	New Haven	Total
Demographic characteristics			
Gender (%)			
Female	95.3	96.3	96.1
Male	4.7	3.7	3.9
Age (%)			
Under 20	9.1	9.3	9.2
20-24	18.5	18.4	18.5
25-34	41.0	37.4	38.3
35-44	22.8	23.8	23.6
45 and over	8.6	11.1	10.5
Average age (years)	31.4	32.3	32.1
Ethnicity (%)			
White, non-Hispanic	63.5	27.8	36.5
Black, non-Hispanic	21.5	46.2	40.2
Hispanic	13.6	25.3	22.5
Other	1.5	0.6	0.8
Family status			
Marital status (%)			
Never married	53.8	66.1	63.1
Married, living with spouse	5.6	3.1	3.7
Married, living apart	15.7	12.7	13.4
Separated	2.4	6.3	5.4
Divorced	21.3	9.8	12.6
Widowed	1.2	2.0	1.8
Number of children (%)			
None[a]	11.7	11.2	11.3
One child	46.2	41.3	42.5
Two children	25.4	25.6	25.5
Three children	11.7	13.6	13.1
Four or more children	5.0	8.4	7.6
Average number of children	1.5	1.7	1.7
Age of youngest child (%)			
2 and under	36.3	36.7	36.6
3-5	21.3	22.9	22.5
6 and over	42.4	40.4	40.9

(continued)

Table 1.3 (continued)

Characteristic	Manchester	New Haven	Total
Work history			
Ever worked (%)	94.9	85.1	87.5
Ever worked full-time for 6 months or more for one employer (%)	65.2	55.0	57.6
Any earnings in past 12 months (%)	61.3	42.6	47.6
Approximate earnings in past 12 months (%)			
None	38.7	57.4	52.4
$1-999	16.2	12.6	13.6
$1,000-4,999	22.1	12.8	15.3
$5,000-9,999	10.2	8.5	9.0
$10,000 or more	12.8	8.6	9.7
Current employment status			
Work status this month (%)			
Currently employed	30.2	21.9	23.9
Among those currently employed, average hourly wage ($)	6.82	7.18	7.09
Among those currently employed, average hours worked per week (%)			
1-19	32.8	34.3	33.8
20-29	30.9	29.7	30.0
30 or more	36.3	36.1	36.2
Among those not currently employed			
Looking for full-time work	32.3	34.1	33.7
Looking for part-time work	17.0	11.7	12.8
Not looking for work	45.6	51.4	50.1
Have a job, but not working now	5.2	2.9	3.4
Educational status			
Highest degree/diploma earned (%)			
GED[b]	16.8	8.7	10.7
High school diploma	45.3	48.2	47.5
Technical/2-year college degree	5.7	4.1	4.5
4-year (or more) college degree	2.2	2.0	2.0
None of the above	30.0	37.1	35.4
Highest grade completed in school (average)	11.4	11.1	11.2
Public assistance status			
Aid status (%)			
Applicant	47.6	36.0	38.8
Recipient	52.4	64.0	61.2

(continued)

Table 1.3 (continued)

Characteristic	Manchester	New Haven	Total
Total prior AFDC receipt[c] (%)			
None	24.0	17.8	19.3
Less than 4 months	4.8	6.1	5.8
4 months or more but less than 1 year	7.6	9.1	8.7
1 year or more but less than 2 years	8.7	9.0	8.9
2 years or more but less than 5 years	23.3	21.5	22.0
5 years or more but less than 10 years	19.9	19.6	19.7
10 years or more	11.7	16.9	15.6
Resided as a child in a household receiving AFDC (%)			
Yes, aid received 5 years or more	12.3	17.9	16.5
Yes, aid received less than 5 years	10.2	8.6	9.0
No	68.0	62.0	63.4
Don't know	9.5	11.6	11.1
Housing status			
Current housing status (%)			
Public housing	5.1	12.6	10.7
Subsidized housing	24.2	23.3	23.5
Emergency or temporary housing	1.6	1.0	1.2
None of the above	69.2	63.2	64.6
Number of moves in the past 2 years (%)			
None	39.9	41.9	41.4
1 or 2	48.3	50.3	49.8
3 or more	11.8	7.8	8.8
Current and recent education and training activities			
Currently enrolled in education or training[d] (%)			
Any type	13.9	17.3	16.5
GED preparation[b]	2.3	2.5	2.4
Vocational education/skills training	2.5	2.0	2.1
Post-secondary education	4.1	4.3	4.3
High school	1.8	1.9	1.9
Other activity[e]	3.9	8.0	7.0
Enrolled in education or training during the past 12 months[d] (%)			
Any type	16.1	21.9	20.5
GED preparation[b]	3.4	2.5	2.7
Vocational education/skills training	3.2	2.7	2.8
Post-secondary education	4.8	5.1	5.0
High school	2.1	2.4	2.3
Other activity[e]	3.6	10.8	9.1
Sample size	1,322	4,186	5,508

(continued)

Table 1.3 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using data from Background Information Forms.

NOTES: This sample includes single-parent cases randomly assigned from January 1, 1996, through February 28, 1997. A total of 220 sample members with missing Background Information Forms are not included in the table.

Invalid or missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in the calculation of sums and differences.

[a]This category includes sample members who were pregnant with their first child at the time of random assignment, and child-only caregiver cases that may have reported having no children of their own.

[b]The General Educational Development (GED) certificate is given to those who pass the GED test and is intended to signify knowledge of basic high school subjects.

[c]This refers to the total number of months accumulated from one or more spells on an individual's own or spouse's AFDC case. It does not include AFDC receipt under a parent's name.

[d]Because some sample members may be in more than one category, totals may not equal all categories summed.

[e]Includes Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, Job Search/Job Club, and Work Experience.

not made until after people had been assigned to the Jobs First group. This means that some members of the Jobs First group have not been subject to the time limit or employment services mandates.[17]

The last column of Table 1.3, which presents the figures for both research sites combined, shows that the single-parent sample members are overwhelmingly female, and their average age is just over 30. Just over one-fourth of the clients were under 25 when they entered the study.

Most of the sample members had small families — about 80 percent had two or fewer children when they entered the study — but more than half had at least one pre-school child at that point.

The data in Table 1.3 also provide some evidence about the magnitude of the challenge involved in helping these individuals find and keep jobs. On the one hand, a very large proportion of the sample members had at least some work experience. However, more than 40 percent had never worked full-time for a single employer for six months, and less than 20 percent had earned $5,000 or more in the year prior to entering the study. More than half the sample members had at least a high school diploma or equivalent, but very few had earned a two- or four-year college degree.

Most of the sample members had received welfare for a substantial amount of time before entering Jobs First: More than half had received assistance for two or more years. But relatively few grew up in households that received welfare.

The data also show some important differences in the characteristics of the target group in New Haven and Manchester. The most striking difference is in the racial/ethnic composition: In Manchester, the caseload is about two-thirds white, non-Hispanic, while in New Haven, it is about half black, non-Hispanic, and one-fourth Hispanic.

The New Haven clients are also likely to be somewhat less employable: On average, they have less work experience and lower levels of education. This may be related to the fact that a larger proportion of New Haven sample members were already receiving welfare when they entered the study; in Manchester, most were randomly assigned when they were applying for welfare.

V. About This Report

A. Time Frame and Data Sources

The report covers roughly the first two years of Jobs First's operations — from early 1996 to early 1998. It draws on several data sources to describe the program's implementation during this period:

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[17] One particular category of cases — so called "child-only cases" in which there is no adult who is counted in the grant calculation — may be excluded from the research sample at a later date, because these cases are likely to be permanently exempt.

- **Field research.** MDRC staff periodically visit the research offices, interviewing line staff, supervisors, and managers and observing program activities. During the most recent visits, in February 1998, MDRC reviewed 25 specific cases with the staff members who were responsible for these cases, in order to better understand the process used to decide which clients will receive extensions of the time limit.

- **Staff surveys.** In June 1997, MDRC administered written surveys to nearly all of the DSS staff who work extensively with Jobs First and AFDC group members in the research sites. Altogether, 123 workers completed surveys.[18]

- **Client surveys and focus groups.** MDRC conducted two small-scale telephone surveys of Jobs First and AFDC group members, one in summer 1996 and one in spring 1997. The second of these surveys is discussed in this report. (The first was discussed in the earlier paper produced by MDRC.) In addition, 18 Jobs First group members participated in small group discussions in June 1997.

- **Data from Connecticut's Eligibility Management System (EMS).** Data from Connecticut's statewide public benefits computer system, EMS, were used for the analysis of caseload dynamics and time limit outcomes presented in Chapter 4.

B. Organization of the Report

The report is divided into four chapters. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 sets the stage by describing some of the key challenges involved in implementing Jobs First. Chapters 3 and 4 return to these key challenges, describing how these issues have been addressed in the research sites. Chapter 3 focuses on the services and message of Jobs First during the period before recipients reach the time limit; Chapter 4 presents preliminary information on the process that occurs as recipients approach and then reach the time limit.

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[18] The completion rates and numbers of completions are as follows: New Haven case maintenance workers: 98 percent (n=60); New Haven intake workers: 75 percent (n=15); New Haven employment services workers: 100 percent (n=15); Manchester case maintenance workers: 74 percent (n=17); Manchester intake workers: 100 percent (n=10); Manchester employment services workers: 100 percent (n=6).

Chapter 2

Challenges in Implementing Jobs First

Any effort to generate dramatic changes in the mission and activities of a large agency or system is bound to face challenges, especially during its start-up period. This chapter discusses some of the specific challenges that have faced Connecticut DSS during the first two years of Jobs First's implementation. The first section of the chapter discusses the general context, highlighting several issues that have created a challenging environment in which to implement Jobs First. The second section discusses several specific challenges that arise from the nature of Jobs First's policies.

I. The Context for Jobs First's Implementation

Several general issues, not directly related to the content of Job First's policies, have created a challenging environment in which to implement the program.

First, Jobs First was implemented statewide from its inception. Many of the large states did not develop far-reaching welfare reforms prior to the 1996 welfare law, and those that did typically pilot-tested the initiatives in a few areas for one or two years before taking them statewide.[1] Connecticut is not one of the nation's largest states, but it has several very poor urban areas, and its current statewide welfare caseload is the 20th largest in the country. Although the state's welfare system is state-administered, meaning that key policies are generally the same across the state, DSS is a large and diverse agency, with about 2,700 employees, a host of subcontractors, and an annual budget of more than $3 billion. Moreover, local managers exercise some discretion over the specifics of program implementation. In short, DSS faced a major task in implementing the new program throughout the state simultaneously.

Second, Jobs First was implemented on a tight timetable that left limited time for advance planning. Only about six months elapsed between the date the program was approved by the Connecticut legislature and the date when it was implemented statewide. In addition, federal waivers for Jobs First were approved in late December 1995, only about two weeks before the implementation date. Although the federal government approved most of the key policies that had been proposed by Connecticut (and some other elements of Jobs First did not require waivers), the waiver did require some changes, particularly in the criteria for time limit extensions. This is not to say that advance planning can eliminate all start-up problems; even the best planner cannot anticipate all the issues that will emerge when a program starts operating. Nevertheless, start-up problems are probably more likely to occur in a program that is implemented with limited time for planning.

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[1] For example, the Wisconsin Works (W-2) initiative, implemented statewide in 1997, was based on a pilot program, Work Not Welfare, that began in two small counties in January 1995. Similarly, Florida's statewide WAGES program, initiated in 1996, was preceded by the Family Transition Program, a pilot program that began operating in two medium-sized counties in 1994.

Third, Jobs First was the second major welfare reform program implemented in Connecticut in a two-year period. An earlier initiative, A Fair Chance, developed before the current Governor took office, had been implemented in late 1994. Although the two programs share some common features, their overall approaches and philosophies are quite different. In interviews conducted in early 1996, many line staff said they were having difficulty absorbing a second major set of policy changes in a short period. Some commented on the rapid demise of A Fair Chance and expressed skepticism about whether Jobs First would survive in its current form.

Fourth, in addition to Jobs First, the past three years have witnessed a host of other major initiatives in Connecticut's social welfare system. During this period, the state has implemented a Medicaid managed care initiative, privatized the administration of many of its child care programs, begun an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program and a digital imaging program, and assumed responsibility for General Assistance programs from several of its largest municipalities. Currently, DSS and the state Department of Labor are redesigning the state's employment services for welfare recipients, and DSS is planning a major restructuring of the line staff who work with TFA recipients and a new "upfront diversion" effort (discussed below). Also, since mid-1997, Connecticut, like many other states, has devoted considerable effort to meeting federal participation rates under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Many of these other initiatives are not directly related to Jobs First, but they have affected the same managers and staff who are responsible for the program. Frequently, when asked questions about their experiences with Jobs First, staff have focused instead on other changes that have had an equally important impact on their day-to-day work lives. Many staff have also expressed concern that statewide privatization efforts would eventually threaten their jobs.

Finally, the Connecticut legislature enacted important changes to Jobs First in mid-1997. These changes, discussed further in Chapter 4, included the creation of Individual Performance Contracts (IPCs) for recipients who are in danger of losing their benefits at the time limit owing to lack of a good-faith effort to find employment. The IPCs give them an opportunity to "restore" their good faith before reaching the time limit. Staff needed to act quickly to put these changes in place before clients began to reach the time limit in fall 1997.

II. Specific Challenges Associated with Jobs First

This section describes four major tasks that DSS has faced in implementing Jobs First — explaining the new policies to recipients, reorienting employment services, changing the message of the welfare system, and developing a pre-time limit review process — and identifies some of the key challenges associated with each task.

A. Explaining the New Policies

The success of Jobs First's two central policies — the time limit and the earned income disregard — hinges on communication. Both policies would "work" to some extent even if no recipients were aware of their existence. Earnings would be disregarded for working recipients, and EMS would track the time limit clock and call recipients in for exit interviews (discussed below) as they approached the time limit. But both of the policies are designed to do more: The time limit is intended to spur both recipients and the system to focus on self-sufficiency well before Month 21. Similarly, the disregard aims not only to reward recipients who work, but also to encourage recipients who would not otherwise have gone to work to take this step. Indeed, if the disregard does not encourage people to go to work, it will mostly provide additional income (and welfare benefits) to people who would have worked anyway. In short, neither policy will have its full range of desired impacts unless recipients understand the policies and know how to most effectively respond.

Explaining dramatic new policies can be a challenging task — particularly if recipients have received benefits for some time under the old rules. Line staff must understand the policies themselves, and then must transmit the information in a consistent way to recipients. In addition, beyond simply explaining the new rules in general, staff need to help recipients understand how the rules are likely to affect them personally and plan an appropriate strategy for responding.

Jobs First's earned income disregard was explicitly designed to address this challenge. Typically, earned income disregard policies are designed to gradually reduce welfare benefits as earnings increase. For example, one common model disregards a flat amount of earned income each month and a specific percentage of the remainder. This more common approach avoids the "cliff" that exists in the Jobs First policy — under Jobs First, a recipient may retain her entire welfare grant if she earns one dollar below the poverty level but will lose her entire grant if she earns one dollar more — but may be considerably more difficult for clients to understand. The Jobs First policy was selected in large part because it is simple and straightforward to explain and administer (although, as discussed further in Chapter 3, the disregard may become more difficult to explain in the future, as more recipients experience the pre-time limit review process; during the exit interview, income is compared with the payment standard rather than with the poverty level).

Jobs First's time limit is also relatively straightforward. While some other states limit recipients to a specific number of months of benefits over a longer period — for example, 24 months in any 60-month period — Jobs First sets a simple limit of 21 months. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, it is less clear how staff should present the extension policy to recipients before they reach the limit. Recipients' perceptions about the likelihood of extensions may influence their responses to the time limit.

B. Reorienting Employment Services

Like most other states, Connecticut has years of experience providing employment-related services to welfare recipients. The specific services — education, training, job search assistance, etc. — are generally provided by outside agencies under contracts or other arrangements (sometimes these agencies have separate funding streams), while DSS employment services staff provide case management.

As part of Jobs First, DSS sought to make fundamental changes in Job Connection, the state's pre-existing welfare-to-work program. The key goal of these changes was to reorient the program to focus on moving participants rapidly into jobs, rather than on providing education and training to build their skills. This change was seen as important in its own right — DSS felt that the "work first" focus was more effective — and also as a critical companion to Jobs First's time limit and financial work incentives. In addition to this change, it was also necessary to greatly increase the scale of Job Connection, and to impose participation mandates more broadly than in the past.

*1. **Increasing scale and imposing mandates.*** The Family Support Act of 1988, the last major federal welfare reform bill enacted prior to the 1996 law, created the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program to fund state welfare-to-work programs. Under JOBS, each state was allotted a specific amount of federal funding for employment-related services for welfare recipients, but states needed to spend their own money in order to draw down the federal funds. Although JOBS was officially described as a mandatory program, a substantial proportion of AFDC recipients were exempt from participation requirements in most states; moreover, states were only required to ensure that a specific proportion of the "non-exempt" caseload — ranging from 7 percent in fiscal year 1990 to 20 percent in fiscal year 1995 — were participating in a typical month.

As in most other states, a relatively small fraction of Connecticut's adult AFDC recipients participated in Job Connection, Connecticut's JOBS program, in a typical month. For example, in September 1995, about 29,000 of Connecticut's roughly 55,000 adult recipients were considered mandatory for JOBS, and about 7,000 met the program's stringent definition of participation (many others were employed while receiving assistance). In fiscal year 1994, the state drew down less than 60 percent of the federal funds available to it.[2] With the program's capacity limited, JOBS participation was not really mandatory for most Connecticut AFDC recipients; in fact, there was a sizable waiting list for the program.

Connecticut began to narrow the range of recipients who were exempt from employment activities even before Jobs First, but the new program accelerated this process: In September 1997, about 39,000 of the state's 52,000 TFA cases were subject to the time limit.[3] In addition, the presence of the time limit magnified the need to ensure that all mandatory recipients actually received appropriate assistance. Finally, the design of the time limit made it imperative that staff be able to administer a mandatory program: In the absence of special circumstances, only recipients who make a good-faith effort to find work are eligible for extensions of the time limit. Because "good-faith effort" is defined primarily in terms of sanctions, it is necessary for staff to actively monitor and enforce participation mandates in order to determine who has made a good-faith effort.

DSS sought to accomplish this large increase in participation levels without increasing the number of employment services staff, and the Jobs First employment services model was designed to facilitate this objective. The original plan envisioned many recipients starting with three to six months of Self-Directed Job Search. Welfare eligibility workers would explain this requirement to recipients and give them forms to document their job search, but there would be no ongoing monitoring. Instead, at the end of the period, recipients would be required to pass a "work test" — that is, to provide evidence to their eligibility worker that they had looked for jobs.[4] Recipients who passed the work test and did not have a job could be referred to structured Job Search Skills Training courses administered by contracted providers.

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[2] Nationally, 20 states drew down their full allotment in that year, and another 20 states drew down between 70 and 99 percent of their allotment.

[3] As noted in Chapter 1, a case is subject to the time limit if at least one adult member is required to participate in employment activities.

Under this model, employment services staff would have extensive contact only with recipients who went through these upfront activities without finding a job; these clients would be assessed and referred to education, training, or other activities. Given the improving labor market and the powerful financial incentives included in Jobs First, it was assumed that this "funnel" would greatly reduce the number of people who needed to have direct contact with employment services staff.

2. ***Shifting to a "work first" focus.*** As in many other states, Connecticut's JOBS program had focused heavily on education and training activities. For example, data reported by DSS for September 1995 showed that about three-fourths of countable JOBS participants were enrolled in post-secondary education, vocational training, remedial education, English as a Second Language classes, or preparation for a high school equivalency certificate (GED).

Jobs First sought to bring about a dramatic shift toward a "work first" philosophy, stressing activities that would lead to rapid job placement. As discussed earlier, the model assumed that virtually all mandatory recipients would begin with job search activities, and that education and training would be restricted to those who were unable to find jobs during a lengthy upfront job search. This required the regional offices to change their subcontracting arrangements — for example, shifting resources to agencies that could provide Job Search Skills Training to large numbers of recipients.

It also required a change in the role and message of employment services staff. Before Jobs First, employment services case managers worked with relatively small caseloads, helping each participant develop an individualized employability plan. Under the new program, caseloads are much larger and initial activity assignments are much less flexible. Moreover, staff were expected to start sending a strong message that "any job is a good job."

C. Changing the Message: The Role of Eligibility Staff

In addition to its specific policy changes, Jobs First seeks to change the "message" that is transmitted from the welfare system to recipients. In short, the goal is to shift the focus away from income maintenance and toward helping participants achieve self-sufficiency.

Welfare eligibility workers are the main points of contact between recipients and the system. Hence, eligibility staff must play a central role in any effort to change the day-to-day message that is transmitted by the system to recipients.

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[4] In order to pass the work test, recipients must have attended a Jobs First orientation, registered with the Department of Labor Job Service, completed a job application or resume, completed a self-assessment form, and contacted at least five employers per week.

Two main categories of eligibility workers play key roles in Jobs First. Intake workers, who are responsible for processing initial welfare applications, usually provide the first explanation of the program's new rules and philosophy to welfare applicants. Case maintenance workers have ongoing responsibility for cases once they are approved. These staff provided the introduction to Jobs First for the "on-board" caseload — recipients who entered the program in 1996 when their eligibility was being redetermined — and they are responsible for repeating and reinforcing the message to all recipients.

Since the early 1970s, welfare eligibility functions have generally been separated from social service functions. Under this model, eligibility workers have been directed to focus their energies primarily on reducing errors and incorrect payments. Their job was not to urge or assist recipients to leave welfare — rather, it was to ensure that they received the correct amount of money. This was perhaps not surprising, given the strong public focus on governmental waste, fraud, and abuse. Efforts to shift this focus require a profound change in the mindset of eligibility staff.

Once again, DSS took steps to facilitate this transition. Most important, under the new program, employed recipients are no longer subject to "monthly reporting" — a requirement to provide monthly documentation of their income. In the past, some observers believed that eligibility workers actually preferred it when their clients did not work, because employed cases required more staff work and were more prone to errors. Eliminating monthly reporting made sense, given the design of the earned income disregard — changes in earnings do not affect recipients' grant amounts unless their earnings rise above the poverty level. But it was also intended to send a new message about priorities to both recipients and workers and to free up staff to spend more time helping recipients move toward self-sufficiency.

D. Developing a Pre-Time Limit Review Process

Like many of the other states that initiated time limit programs under federal waivers granted prior to the 1996 welfare law, Connecticut's policy includes special provisions for clients who "play by the rules" but cannot find jobs. Specifically, as discussed earlier, extensions are granted to clients who make a good-faith effort to find a job but have family income below the welfare payment standard when they reach the time limit, or at any point thereafter.[1] Extensions are also granted when there are "circumstances beyond the control" of the recipient that prevent her from working.

The critical challenge in implementing a policy of this kind is to create a review process that is flexible enough to account for individual circumstances but consistent enough to ensure that clients in similar situations will receive similar treatment. Moreover, the process must be administratively straightforward, so that large numbers of cases can be reviewed without placing an undue burden on staff.

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[1] DSS's original waiver application included provisions for extensions for clients who made a good-faith effort but could not find jobs. The specific extension criterion based on the payment standard was imposed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the waiver terms and conditions, and was subsequently codified by the Connecticut General Assembly in the spring of 1997 under PA 97-2 of the June 18 Special Session.

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Connecticut chose to balance these objectives by developing a relatively objective, easy-to-measure definition of "good-faith effort" — one based primarily on the client's history of sanctions — and adding a more flexible safety valve for clients who were deemed not to have made a good-faith effort: The definition of "circumstances beyond one's control" leaves room to consider individual situations. Overall, the policy errs on the side of caution: A client with income below the payment standard who shows up for an exit interview in her 20th month of benefits will have her benefits discontinued only if she was sanctioned twice (or quit a job without good cause in the last six months), failed to "redeem" herself through an Individual Performance Contract (IPC), *and* is determined not to have current circumstances beyond her control that prevent her from working.

Although the Jobs First extension policy is straightforward in some respects, there are several complex issues involved in making it work. For example, while the definition of "good-faith effort" is straightforward, implementing it depends on careful monitoring of clients' participation in required activities during the pre-time limit period; without such monitoring, clients will be assumed to have made a good-faith effort (because they were not sanctioned) even if they did not in fact do so. On the other hand, if a client truly has circumstances beyond her control that prevent her from working, these same circumstances may cause her to miss the interview at which the determination is made, causing her case to be closed. Moreover, a client's record of compliance depends in part on how individual workers have interpreted the program's "good cause" policies.

Chapter 3

Jobs First in the Pre-Time Limit Period

This chapter discusses how Jobs First has operated in the research sites during the pre-time limit period — the period before recipients reach the 21-month time limit. After an introductory section describing the limits of the analysis, the chapter returns to several of the key challenges identified in Chapter 2, discussing how these issues have been addressed in the research sites over the past two years. The second section of the chapter focuses on how Jobs First's policies have been explained and marketed, the third section discusses employment services, and the fourth section describes the changing role of eligibility staff. The final section looks at these issues from the perspective of Jobs First participants, drawing from a small-scale telephone survey and group discussions with members of the Jobs First group.

I. The Limits of This Analysis

In considering the issues raised in this chapter, it is important to note several limitations of the analysis.

First, as discussed in the previous chapter, Jobs First calls for broad and radical changes in the mission, philosophy, and day-to-day activities of Connecticut's welfare system. As one long-time observer of public policy has pointed out: "Major policy change can never be expected to work smoothly from the start. Implementation must be to a considerable extent incremental, experimental, and adaptive."[1] Given this reality, it seems quite likely that Jobs First will operate differently in the future than it has during its start-up period. For example, as discussed below, a major staff restructuring planned for mid-1998 may address some of the key issues identified in this chapter. Nevertheless, the start-up period is critical, because the Jobs First group members who are being studied in the evaluation's impact analysis experienced the program primarily during this period — almost all were randomly assigned during the first year of program operations.

Second, the observations reported in this chapter are drawn only from the research sites, New Haven and Manchester, which cover about one-fourth of the statewide TFA caseload. As discussed earlier, DSS's regional offices exercise some discretion over the specifics of program implementation, particularly with regard to employment services; and as might be expected, programs and policies are implemented differently in different places. In addition, staff who have worked in more than one office report that the "culture" of each office is different, and that this can affect the way programs operate. Indeed, this chapter highlights some important differences between New Haven and Manchester. In short, Jobs First may look different in other areas of the state that are not part of this analysis.

Third, this is a preliminary analysis based on a few sources of data: interviews with staff and managers, observation of activities, reviews of documents, a staff survey, and small-scale surveys and interviews with some clients. MDRC did not collect any systematic data from program case files, did not conduct any large-scale surveys of Jobs First participants, and used only very limited data from EMS. The issues discussed in this chapter will be examined more fully in the evaluation's interim report, scheduled for 1999.

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[1] Martha Derthick, *Agency Under Stress: The Social Security Administration in American Government* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990).

II. Explaining and Marketing Jobs First's Policies

Chapter 2 discussed the critical role of communication: Jobs First's policies must be explained well in order to have their full desired impacts. This section focuses on how staff in the research districts have transmitted information about Jobs First's two main features: the time limit and the earned income disregard.

A. Discussing the Time Limit

As discussed earlier, the time limit is intended not only to limit the duration of welfare stays, but also to motivate clients to take steps toward self-sufficiency *before* they reach the limit. Whether this occurs will depend in part on when and how staff discuss the time limit with clients.

1. Informing and reminding clients about the time limit. Discussions with line staff, observation of client interviews, and results from the mid-1997 staff survey all indicate that clients are routinely informed and reminded about the Jobs First time limit. (Client survey results, discussed in the last section of this chapter, suggest that a large majority of clients are indeed aware that they are subject to a time limit and know its length.)

Jobs First group members were first informed about the time limit at the initial application or redetermination appointment during which their random assignment took place. Some clients also attended voluntary group orientation sessions that provided an overview of Jobs First's policies and/or heard about these policies when they attended Job Search Skills Training (JSST) programs.

According to Figure 3.1, which shows the responses to several questions from the staff survey, case maintenance workers in both sites report that they routinely remind clients about the time limit and the time remaining on their clocks at redetermination appointments, and are also quite likely to do so during other contacts with clients.[2] Employment services workers also reported in the survey that they often remind clients about the time remaining on their clocks (not shown in the figure). Finally, when EMS generates notices scheduling clients for redetermination appointments, each notice reminds the client about the time remaining on her clock.

At the same time, it is important to note that Jobs First participants do not necessarily have very frequent contact with DSS staff. As discussed below, there are relatively few mandatory meetings between case maintenance workers and clients, and most case maintenance work-

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[2] Most of the questions on the staff surveys were constructed in the form of 7-point scales. For the most part, this chapter combines the responses of staff who selected 5, 6, or 7 and describes them as "leaning toward" the high end of the scale. Those who circled 1, 2, or 3 are described as "leaning toward" the low end. Notes in each figure describe the scale for specific questions.

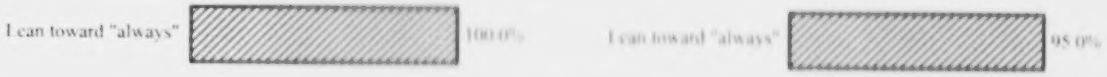
Figure 3.1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

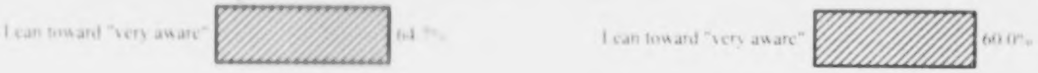
Information About the Time Limit Given to Clients by Case Maintenance Workers

Manchester **New Haven**

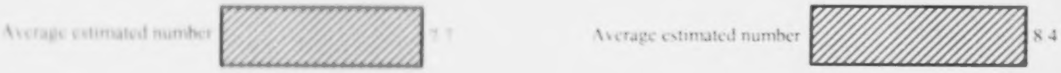
In general, during redetermination interviews, do you remind Jobs First group members about the time that remains on their time limit "clock"?



When you are talking with Jobs First group members between scheduled redetermination interviews, are you not aware or very aware of the amount of time a client has left before reaching her or his time limit?



Suppose that the next 10 clients that you have conversations with between redetermination interviews are not working. If the 10 clients were Jobs First group members, in how many of the conversations would you remind the clients about how much time remained on their time limit "clock"?



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 17, New Haven = 60.

NOTES: The first two questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "never or rarely" (1) to "always" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6 or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "always" response. The second question follows a similar format as the first and also shows the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

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ers report that they have limited contact with many of their clients outside of these formal meetings. Similarly, a later section discusses the fact that many clients have little contact with employment services staff. Thus, while it seems clear that clients are informed and periodically reminded about the time limit, the limited extent of contact between clients and staff suggests that the time limit message may not be very strongly reinforced.

2. ***What do staff tell clients about the time limit?*** Beyond simply informing and reminding clients about the time limit and the time remaining on their clocks, staff may influence clients' responses by the way they discuss the time limit and its implications.

For example, the way staff discuss the extension policy may shape clients' views about whether the time limit is "for real." Discussions with staff in 1996 and early 1997 (before clients began to reach the time limit) suggested that workers adopted one of two general approaches when they discussed extensions. Some workers were quite straightforward: They said that clients who cooperated with the program's mandates would likely receive an extension if they could not find a job. These staff emphasized to clients that they should comply with all program rules to ensure that they did not make themselves ineligible for an extension. Other workers were much less definite, saying that they did not know which clients would receive extensions, and that clients thus needed to try hard to find a job in order to prepare for the possible loss of cash assistance. Workers who adopted the latter approach said they did so because they did not want to lead clients to believe that extensions would be automatic, both because the workers themselves did not know how the extension policy would be implemented and because they wanted clients to remain highly motivated.

The staff survey results presented in Table 3.1 indicate that both case maintenance and intake staff in New Haven generally adopted the former approach: They said that clients who cooperated would likely receive extensions. In contrast, most case maintenance workers in Manchester reported that they expressed less certainty about whether clients would receive extensions. It is not clear whether these responses would be different if the survey were readministered today, after staff (and clients) know how the time limit policy is being implemented.

Interestingly, Table 3.1 also shows that only a minority of case maintenance workers in both sites reported that they are very likely to tell clients about extensions when they discuss the Jobs First time limit. In contrast, intake workers — who introduce the program to new applicants — report they are quite likely to discuss the extension policy. The case maintenance workers' responses are surprising because staff tend to rely on written materials produced by DSS when they describe Jobs First to clients, and these materials clearly describe the extension policy. However, it is important to note that the survey was administered in mid-1997, long after the last "on-board" clients had entered Jobs First. Since case maintenance staff were responsible for introducing the program only to on-board clients, it is possible that they were not focused on this group when they answered the survey question. In other words, these staff may have routinely discussed the extension policy when they *introduced* the program to clients entering Jobs First, but only raised the issue subsequently if the client asked. (Results from the client survey, discussed below, suggest that many clients are aware that extensions are possible, but the survey did not ask this question explicitly.)

Table 3.1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Information That Case Maintenance Workers Give to Clients About Time Limits

	Manchester		New Haven	
Percentage of Staff Who:	Case Maintenance Workers	Intake Workers	Case Maintenance Workers	Intake Workers
Describe their discussions about extensions with clients as follows:				
Most clients will probably receive extensions; your benefits probably will not be canceled after 21 months	0.0	0.0	1.7	7.1
If you cooperate with the program rules but cannot find a job before reaching the time limit, you will probably receive an extension	41.2	77.8	61.7	78.6
Some clients will receive an extension of the time limit and some will not	58.8	11.1	26.7	7.1
Never discuss extensions	0.0	11.1	10.0	7.1
Are very likely to discuss exemptions from the time limit with Jobs First group members	29.4	88.9	45.0	73.3
Are very likely to discuss extensions from the time limit with Jobs First group members	29.4	77.8	54.2	86.7
Often advise clients to go off welfare in order to save remaining months that are allowed under the time limit	47.1	30.0	13.6	33.3
	17	10	60	15

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997.

NOTES: The last three questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the second question ranged from "very unlikely to discuss" (1) to "very likely to discuss" (7). Responses shown for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "very likely to discuss". The third question followed a similar format as the second and shows the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7. The scale for the fourth question ranged from "never give this advice" (1) to "often give this advice" (7), and the table shows the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

Staff also help shape clients' views by discussing the implications of the time limit; that is, by helping clients figure out how to respond. For example, research conducted in other states has found that some programs emphasize the need to "bank" time: Workers urge clients to leave welfare quickly in order to save their available months. In contrast, some programs counsel clients to use their available time to obtain education or training.[3]

Neither of these messages would mesh very well with Connecticut's policies: Jobs First does not emphasize education or training; and given the generous earnings disregard, clients would lose large amounts of money if they opted not to receive welfare upon finding a job. In addition, there is in theory no need for clients to bank time, because those who make a good-faith effort can receive an unlimited number of extensions. Thus, it is not surprising that, on the survey, fewer than half of case maintenance workers in Manchester, and only 14 percent in New Haven, said that they often advise clients to go off welfare in order to save the remaining months allowed under the time limit. As noted earlier, in discussing the time limit, staff reported that they were much more likely to urge clients to find a job as quickly as possible and to cooperate with program rules.

In general, many staff have reported in interviews that they have received relatively little guidance about how the time limit should be presented. Staff report that the training they receive tends to focus on rules and regulations, not on how to discuss the new policies with clients. Staff have also reported that they were not informed about how the extension policy would be implemented until just before the first clients reached the time limit,[4] and that this made it difficult for them to respond to clients' questions before that point. (This issue is obviously unique to the early implementation period, before clients began to reach the time limit.)

B. The Earned Income Disregard

As with the time limit, it seems clear that clients are routinely informed and reminded about the existence of the Jobs First earned income disregard. For example, 82 percent of case maintenance workers in Manchester and 95 percent of workers in New Haven reported that, during a typical redetermination interview, they are likely to discuss how much of her welfare benefits a client could keep if she went to work (not shown in the figures).

At the same time, it appears that workers have relatively few opportunities to strongly "market" the disregard because, as noted earlier, their contact with many clients is limited. Moreover, staff survey results (not shown) suggest that, even when they discuss the policy, many workers may not clearly explain its implications to individual clients. For example, only about half of case maintenance workers in either site reported that, when working with a newly approved client who is added to their caseload, they would give specific examples of how the client's income would increase if she worked. Concrete examples of this kind may be critical in marketing a financial incentive policy.

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[3] Amy Brown, Dan Bloom, and David Butler, *The View from the Field: As Time Limits Approach, Welfare Recipients and Staff Talk About Their Attitudes and Expectations* (New York: MDRC, 1997).

[4] This may have been in part because the legislature enacted changes in mid-1997 that affected the review process.

Finally, recent discussions with staff suggest that the disregard may become more difficult to explain and discuss in the future. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, staff have reported that some of the clients who have appeared for 20-month exit interviews have expressed confusion about why their income was compared with the *payment standard* to determine whether they would receive an extension; these clients had grown accustomed to a policy that allowed them to receive benefits as long as their earnings did not exceed the *poverty level*. This confusion is not surprising, because staff were not expected to discuss the details of the extension policy in the early operational period. Nevertheless, as these clients discuss their experiences with friends and family — and the payment standard benchmark becomes more familiar — staff may find it more difficult to explain the poverty-level disregard in the future.

III. Reorienting Employment Services

Chapter 2 discusses DSS's attempt to reorient Connecticut's welfare-to-work program — to instill a "work first" focus, to increase the program's scale, and to enforce participation mandates. These steps are seen both as ends in themselves and as important companions to the other Jobs First policies.

A. Shifting to a "Work First" Approach

As discussed earlier, the Jobs First employment component is intended to focus on rapid job placement. Most clients entering the program are supposed to be assigned to one of three upfront job search options:

- Self-Directed Job Search (SDJS) for at least 12 weeks, followed by Job Search Skills Training (JSST), not to exceed a combined total of 12 months (SDJS itself is limited to a maximum of 6 consecutive months);
- Job Search Skills Training, not to exceed 6 months; or
- Individual Job Search, not to exceed 6 months.

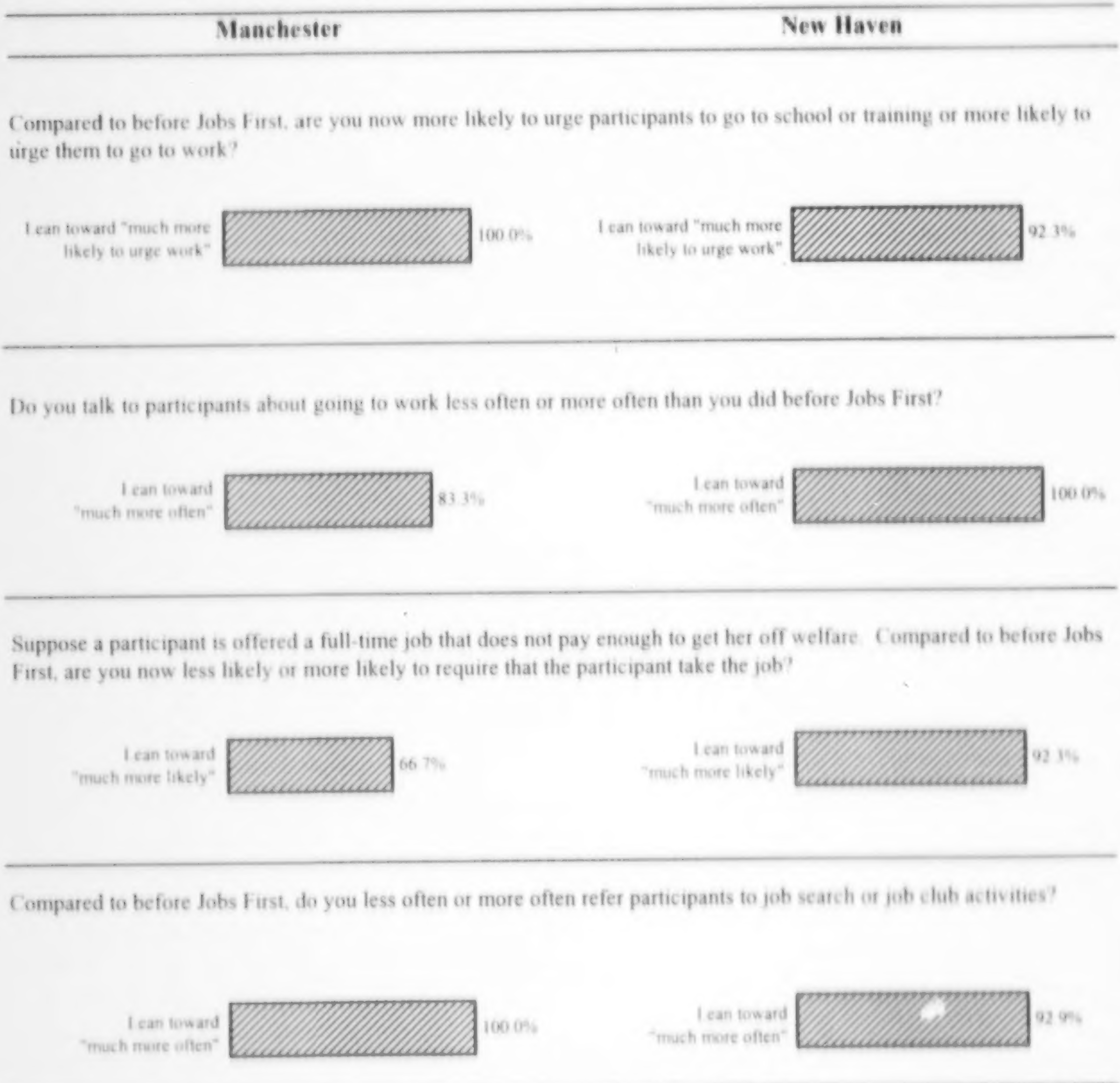
SDJS is not intended to be monitored on an ongoing basis; instead, after a specified time has elapsed (e.g., 3 to 6 months), case maintenance workers are supposed to meet with clients who are still unemployed to administer a work test to determine whether the client has complied with the requirement to search for work. (As discussed in Chapter 1, the work test is actually a checklist of tasks that the client must have completed.) Clients who pass the work test and are still unemployed may be referred to JSST for further assistance; JSST is operated under contract by outside agencies. As discussed in Chapter 2, this universal "work first" model represents a dramatic change from the state's prior approach, under which clients worked with staff to develop individualized plans that often stressed upfront education and training activities.

1. How "work first" has operated in practice. It is clear that Jobs First has generated dramatic changes in the nature of employment services in both the Manchester and New Haven sites. For example, as shown in Figure 3.2, on the staff survey, employment services workers in both sites were nearly universal in reporting that, as a result of Jobs First, they were placing a

Figure 3.2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Changes in Employment Services Workers' Jobs As a Result of Jobs First



Compared to before Jobs First, are you now more likely to urge participants to go to school or training or more likely to urge them to go to work?

Do you talk to participants about going to work less often or more often than you did before Jobs First?

Suppose a participant is offered a full-time job that does not pay enough to get her off welfare. Compared to before Jobs First, are you now less likely or more likely to require that the participant take the job?

Compared to before Jobs First, do you less often or more often refer participants to job search or job club activities?

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 6, New Haven = 15.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "much more likely to urge school/training" (1) to "much more likely to urge work" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "much more likely to urge work" response. The other questions follow a similar format as the first and also show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

much heavier emphasis on employment, were more likely to urge clients to go to work than to school, and were referring more clients to job search activities.

It also seems clear that both sites have generally implemented a "work first" sequence. In other words, although MDRC has not yet collected individual-level program participation data, it appears that the vast majority of clients have indeed been assigned to upfront job search activities. (Both research sites initially chose the first option above.) However, there was considerable confusion about the details of the upfront sequence during the early months of implementation, particularly among eligibility staff, who had not played much role vis-à-vis employment-related services in the past but were expected to do so under Jobs First. Many staff expressed uncertainty about the timing of the work test, who should administer it, whether it was mandatory, which clients should be referred for JSST, and which staff were responsible for making these referrals (i.e., case maintenance workers or employment services workers). As late as mid-1997, when the staff survey was administered, only 47 percent of case maintenance workers in Manchester and 40 percent of these workers in New Haven reported that they had received enough guidance on "your role in administering employment-related services and activities." (The figures were even lower for intake workers.)

It is also important to note that Self-Directed Job Search (SDJS) was used less extensively than was originally planned. In the New Haven office, for example, all clients entering Jobs First initially began with SDJS. Those who were not employed after three months received a "friendly" letter encouraging (but not requiring) them to come to the office so that their case maintenance worker could administer the work test and, if they passed, refer them fot JSST. The letter told clients that if they did not want to schedule an appointment, they should continue with their job search. The policy called for a mandatory redetermination for all clients still unemployed at the six-month point.

One New Haven manager said that staff found it "scary" to leave clients essentially unmonitored for such a long period, given the short time limit. In addition, staff reported that many clients did not take the SDJS requirement seriously, especially because there was no financial sanction associated with failing the work test. Finally, some staff reported that they felt pressure to increase the number of referrals to the main JSST contractor; they speculated that this agency was having difficulty generating enough revenue to break even on the JSST contract, which paid the agency $120 for each client who reached each of the following milestones: attended an initial orientation, developed an employability plan, completed the workshop, found a job, and remained employed for 60 days. (MDRC could not confirm that contractor revenue shortfalls affected the pattern of client referrals.)

Thus, beginning in March 1996, the New Haven office began bypassing the upfront SDJS for clients who entered the program as on-board recipients; these clients were referred directly to one of several contracted JSST providers. (New applicants were assigned to SDJS for several more months, but eventually they too were referred directly to structured programs.) The JSST programs typically started with one to two weeks of classroom instruction in which clients created a resume, practiced interviewing skills, and strengthened their motivation. This was followed by an additional period of monitored job search; clients looked for jobs on their own and reported back to staff weekly.

The Manchester office followed a similar "work first" sequence. Early in 1996, clients started with SDJS. Later, SDJS was de-emphasized and clients were referred to one of two JSST providers.

2. ***Differences between the sites.*** It appears that the transformation to a "work first" approach has been somewhat more dramatic in Manchester than in New Haven. For example, as shown in Figure 3.3 when asked on the staff survey whether their agency's main goal for Jobs First clients was to "get jobs quickly" or to "raise education and skill levels," all Manchester employment services workers leaned toward the former choice; in contrast, 43 percent of New Haven staff leaned toward "raise education and skill levels" or said the two goals were equally important. Similarly, while all Manchester workers said that they would always counsel a client to take a full-time job that would not get her off welfare rather than enter a training course, fewer than half of New Haven workers answered this way. New Haven workers were also much less likely to say that they encourage clients to "take any job" rather than be selective about the jobs they take.

These responses may reflect a greater continuing emphasis on education and training in New Haven (more detailed data on participation patterns will be collected for the interim report). Some New Haven staff have reported that, in order to generate sufficient referrals for contracted training providers — whose services were intended for clients who had finished job search activities without finding work — they have sometimes referred clients to training programs before they had completed their upfront job search activities. (This practice was related to the fact, discussed below, that many clients who were referred to JSST were not promptly referred back to DSS if they failed to find jobs; this reduced the pool of potential training referrals.)

B. The Changing Role of Employment Services Staff

In addition to changes in the types of activities clients are assigned to attend, employment services workers report that Jobs First has generated fundamental changes in the nature of their work. As might be expected given the earlier discussion, the changes have been especially dramatic in Manchester, but they also affect most workers in New Haven. (Staff survey results and individual interviews suggest that attitudes and staff practices vary considerably among employment services workers in New Haven.)

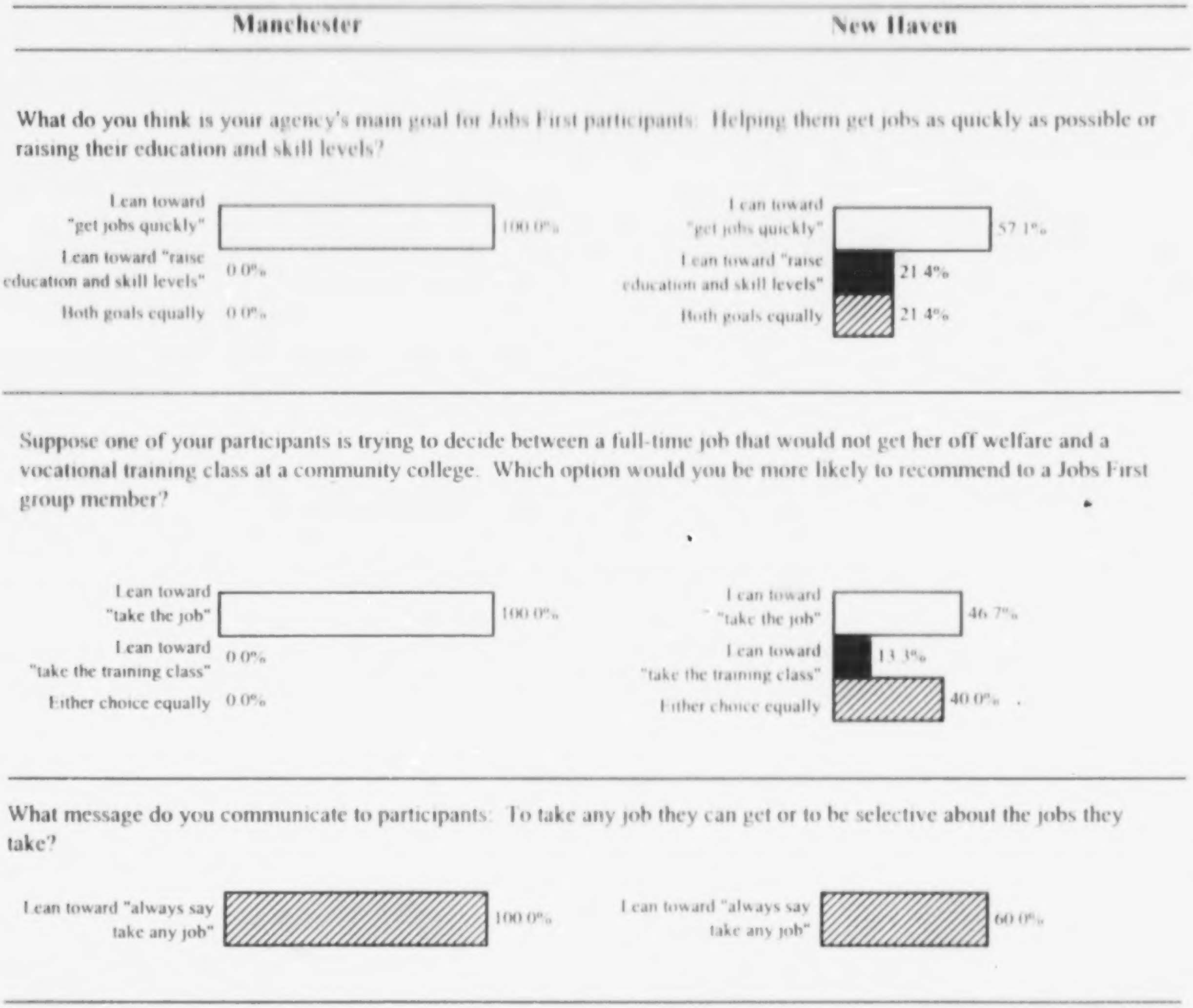
In interviews with employment services workers conducted in 1996, many workers expressed frustration that Jobs First's fixed upfront sequence had reduced their role to that of a "paper pusher." Many workers also complained that their large caseloads made it impossible for them to get to know clients and work with them to overcome barriers to employment. As one worker put it, "with the round 'em up and get 'em out approach, we don't have time to find out where [the clients] are at."

It appears that DSS preventive services social workers may have taken over some of the social service functions that were previously performed by employment services staff. In New Haven, preventive services staff attempt to conduct home visits with all clients who are sanctioned, and with all clients who are unemployed when their time limit clock reaches Month 16.

Figure 3.3

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Employment Services Workers' Views About Appropriate Employment Strategies



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 6, New Haven = 15.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "get jobs quickly" (1) to "both goals equally" (4) to "raise education and skill levels" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 1, 2, or 3 and are described as "leaning toward" the "get jobs quickly" response; the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "raise education and skill levels" response; and the percentage of respondents who circled 4 and indicated that they believe the agency favors "both goals equally." The second question follows a similar format as the first and also shows the percentages of respondents who circled 1, 2, or 3; 5, 6, or 7; and 4.

The figure for the last question shows the percentage of respondents who circled 1, 2, or 3 and are described as "leaning toward" the "always say take any job" response.

These visits may uncover situations that lead to changes in a client's employability plan, or to exemptions.

Interestingly, some employment services staff reported that their jobs had changed by mid-1997, particularly in New Haven. As clients reached the end of their job search activities without jobs, some employment services workers said that they had begun to revert to a role that was more similar to their earlier function: They were helping clients develop employability plans that often included training or education activities. Of course, the time limit constrained the length of the programs people could attend, and large caseloads still prevented staff from spending much time with individual clients.

Figure 3.4 shows that employment services staff in both sites believe that their caseloads have grown, and that clients have less choice about the activities they can enter.

C. Monitoring and Enforcing Employment Services Mandates

As discussed earlier, the level of monitoring and sanctioning during the pre-time limit period has direct implications for the extension process. The determination of whether a client made a good-faith effort to find employment is based on whether she was sanctioned for failing to comply with employment mandates and/or failed the work test (or quit a job without "good cause" in the prior six months). As discussed in the previous section, however, the work test took on less significance than originally planned because Self-Directed Job Search was de-emphasized in practice. Thus, the program's ability to accurately assess whether a good-faith effort is being made depends heavily on the ability of staff to monitor the attendance of clients who are referred to the outside agencies contracted to provide Job Search Skills Training or other activities.

On the staff survey, nearly all employment services workers in both sites reported that, as a result of Jobs First, clients are more likely to be sanctioned if they are not attending their assigned activities (not shown). However, it is important to note that staff have also reported in individual interviews that sanctioning was rare in the past, when participation in employment-related activities was largely voluntary. In other words, almost any sanctioning would represent an increase over past levels. Moreover, it also seems clear that the level of monitoring varies considerably from provider to provider and from worker to worker.

In interviews, employment services workers have identified their large caseloads (often exceeding 500 per worker), frequent reassignment of cases from worker to worker, and inadequate reporting from some contracted providers as key factors that impede their ability to monitor clients' activities. The latter issue seems to have been particularly prevalent in New Haven, where a large number of clients — more than 3,500 in 1996 alone — were referred to the primary JSST provider.[5] DSS staff report that they frequently received little feedback from this provider on whether clients showed up and participated as required. In addition, staff reported that the provider often did not refer clients back to DSS when they completed the 12-week program without finding a job, or when they failed to cooperate. As a result of these monitoring problems,

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[5] The number of clients entering Jobs First was very large in its first year of operations because the entire "on-board" caseload was phased in during this period. Since that time, only applicants have entered the program.

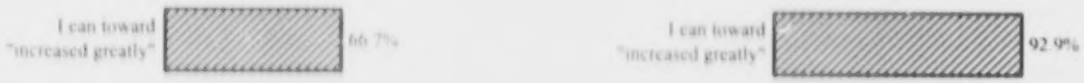
Figure 3.4

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

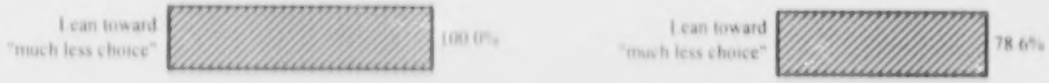
Changes in Employment Services Workers' Jobs As a Result of Jobs First

Manchester **New Haven**

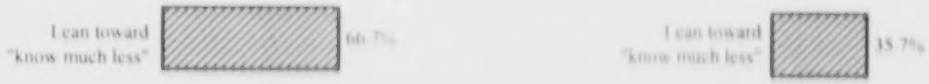
Compared to before Jobs First, has the size of your caseload decreased or increased?



Compared to before Jobs First, do your current participants have less choice or more choice about the kinds of employment-related activities that they can enter?



Compared to before Jobs First, do you know less or more about your participants' family situations?



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 6, New Haven = 15.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "decreased greatly" (1) to "increased greatly" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "increased greatly" response. The bars for the second question show the percentage of respondents who circled 1, 2, or 3 and are described as "leaning toward" the "much less choice" response. The third question follows a similar format as the second and also shows the percentage of respondents who circled 1, 2, or 3.

staff reported that many of the clients who were referred to this JSST provider were not contacted again for many months.

Managers may have been hampered in responding to this issue by the statewide payment rate for JSST — a maximum of $600 per client. Local managers reported that few agencies were interested in providing JSST at that price; thus, managers may have had little choice but to continue working with the providers that had been selected.

In early 1997, in an effort to "catch up," New Haven managers began using the time limit clock as a management tool: They used EMS to generate lists of clients who had used up 16 or 17 months of benefits and were not employed. Employment services staff were directed to place a special emphasis on these clients — to contact them and ensure that they were referred to activities and monitored closely. However, by this time, these clients had relatively little time left on their clocks, limiting the range of options.

Finally, some staff in New Haven have reported that case maintenance workers do not always impose sanctions requested by employment services staff. In interviews, some case maintenance workers have acknowledged that they sometimes contact clients who have been referred for sanctions in order to try to understand the reasons for their noncompliance. Other case maintenance workers, however, said that they assume that this has already been done by employment services staff.

Monitoring and enforcement may become tighter in mid-1998, when DSS implements a major staff reconfiguration. Under the new model, recipients subject to the time limit will be assigned to a single DSS worker — known as a Family Independence Representative (FI-Rep) — who will be responsible both for performing eligibility functions and for monitoring and enforcing employment-related mandates. There will no longer be separate DSS employment services workers, although state Department of Labor staff will take over some of these functions. Most of the FI-Rep positions will likely be filled by staff who are now case maintenance or employment services workers. Research conducted in Columbus, Ohio, found that a similar integrated structure led to a higher rate of participation in employment activities and to more sanctioning, when compared with a traditional divided structure.[9]

D. Employed Clients

Given the very generous earned income disregard, it is not surprising that a large proportion of TFA recipients are working at any given point. In both sites, staff reported that employed clients were given low priority for employment services attention, particularly during the early operational period; as intended, employment services staff focused their energies primarily on clients who could not find jobs on their own. In practice, this meant that when a client found a job and reported it to her case maintenance worker, and the worker entered the earnings information into EMS, the client would be unlikely to be contacted by employment services staff.

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[9] Thomas Brock and Kristen Harknett, "Separation Versus Integration of Income Maintenance and Employment Services: Which Model Is Best? Findings From a Case Management Experiment in Columbus, Ohio" (paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Pittsburgh, Pa., November 2, 1996).

This prioritization, while generally consistent with the program model, had two important side effects. First, staff reported that relatively little attention was focused on clients working for a small number of hours per week or for low wages — even if these clients were not earning enough to be considered self-sufficient. (A single parent with two children working 20 hours per week at $6.00 per hour would be eligible for an extension of the time limit if she made a good-faith effort to find employment and had no other income.) In 1997, some underemployed clients began to be referred to the Connecticut Council of Family Services Agencies' Employment Success Program (ESP) for help in increasing their hours or wages. Underemployed clients are also referred to ESP and other programs during extensions (as discussed further in Chapter 4).

Second, because Jobs First participants' TFA grants are generally not affected when they lose a job (and because there is no required monthly income reporting and infrequent redeterminations), staff report that clients have few incentives to inform their case maintenance worker when they stop working. This, in turn, means that the earnings information recorded in EMS — which partly determines how clients are prioritized for employment services — is often out of date. In other words, clients who were in fact not working may not have been contacted by employment services staff because EMS showed that they had earnings. As discussed in Chapter 4, when clients began to appear for their 20-month exit interviews, staff discovered that some people who they had assumed were working were no longer employed or were earning a different amount than EMS showed. (Of course, inaccuracies can go in both directions: If a client begins working and does not report this fact to DSS, EMS would show her as unemployed when in fact she was working.)

IV. The Changing Role of Eligibility Staff

As discussed in the previous chapter, eligibility workers (case maintenance workers and intake workers) are the key staff who shape the welfare agency's day-to-day message to recipients. This is particularly true in Jobs First, because many clients have only limited contact with employment services staff. Jobs First aims to change the system's message and focus from income maintenance to self-sufficiency.

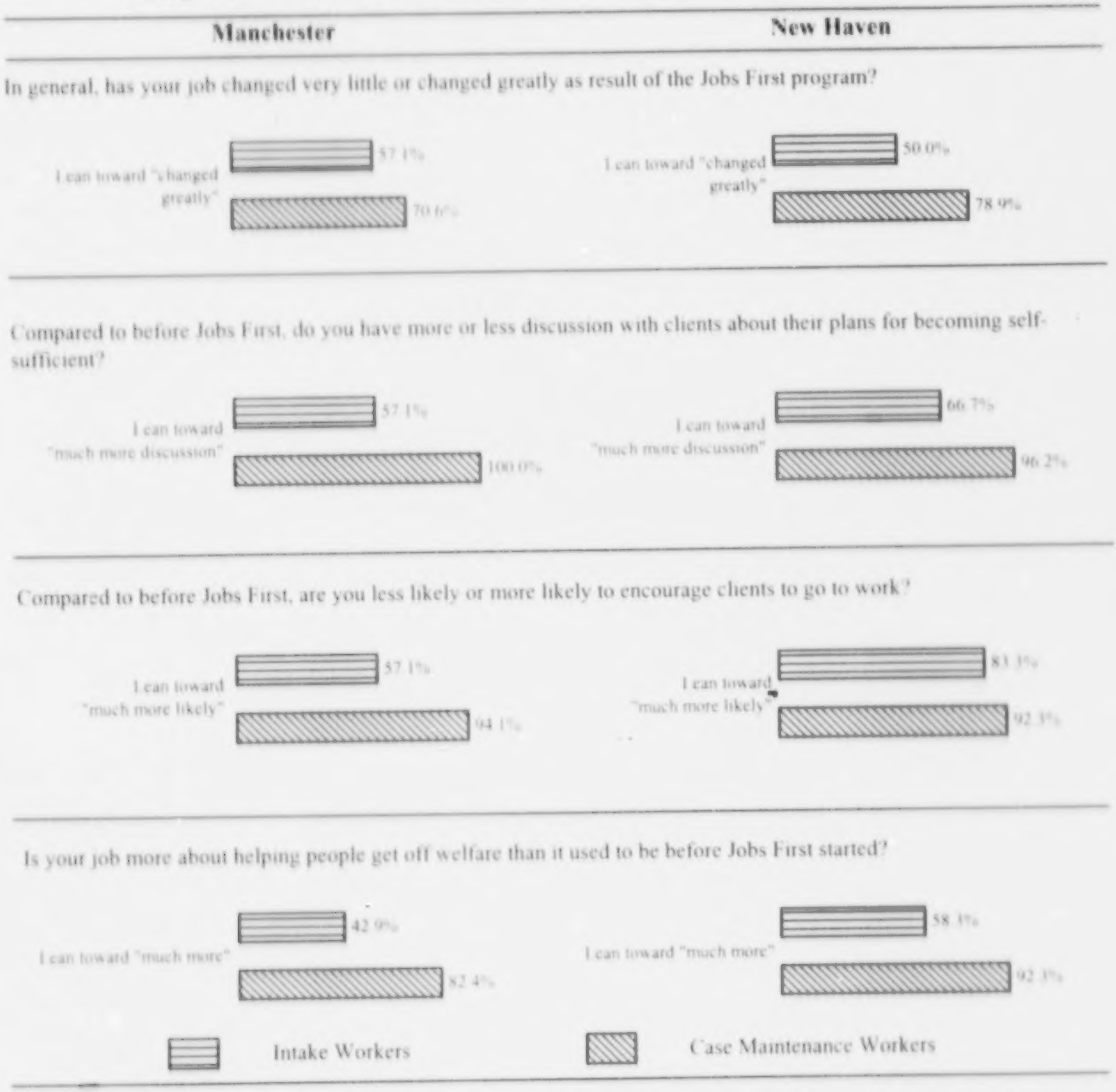
1. Different discussions with clients. In interviews, most case maintenance workers in both New Haven and Manchester reported that Jobs First had stimulated changes in the topics they discuss with clients. This is illustrated in Figure 3.5, which shows that nearly all case maintenance workers in both sites believe that, as a result of Jobs First, they are having more discussions with clients about work and self-sufficiency.

Intake workers were less likely to report dramatic changes in their job or in the topics they discuss with clients. This is perhaps not surprising; although intake staff are responsible for presenting Jobs First policies to applicants, the primary purpose of their work is to determine which clients are eligible for benefits. This emphasis may begin to change shortly, because DSS is preparing to implement a statewide "diversion" program that would steer welfare applicants to alternatives to public assistance. (Interestingly, on another survey question [not shown], the ma-

Figure 3.5

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Changes in Intake and Case Maintenance Workers' Jobs As a Result of Jobs First



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: case maintenance workers, Manchester = 17, New Haven = 60; intake workers, Manchester = 10, New Haven = 15.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "changed very little" (1) to "changed greatly" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "changed greatly" response. The other questions follow a similar format as the first and also show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

jority of intake workers in Manchester report that they already help clients think about alternative income sources that might allow them to avoid going on welfare; this is less common among intake workers in New Haven.)

Another way to look at changes in workers' roles is to compare how staff report interacting with clients in the Jobs First and AFDC groups; in principle, such differences represent changes in staff practices that are attributable to Jobs First. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.6 show the responses to several questions about the extent to which staff say they discuss work and self-sufficiency with clients in the two groups during redetermination and intake interviews, and in other contacts.

Table 3.2 shows that, in both sites, a large majority of case maintenance workers report that they often discuss issues related to self-sufficiency during redetermination interviews with Jobs First clients. Once again, intake workers, particularly in New Haven, are somewhat less likely to discuss these topics during intake interviews.

In Manchester, staff report very large differences in the way they work with clients in the two research groups; most staff said that they do not address issues related to self-sufficiency when working with AFDC group members, implying that Jobs First has stimulated dramatic changes in their practices. The differences between groups are generally somewhat smaller in New Haven. However, it is important to note that, on another question (not shown), the majority of staff reported that the overall changes in their jobs have not been restricted to their work with Jobs First group members; in other words, most staff believe that they also work differently with AFDC group members than they did in the past. Thus, the relatively small between-group differences in New Haven may simply mean that staff have changed the way they work with both types of clients (or that staff always discussed these issues, even before Jobs First).

Figure 3.6 focuses on telephone or in-person discussions with clients that occur between redetermination interviews. As the figure shows, case maintenance workers in both sites report that they would be quite likely to discuss issues related to self-sufficiency in discussions with Jobs First group members and are less likely to do so with AFDC group members. (Again, the differences between groups are larger in Manchester than in New Haven.)

2. ***More client assistance.*** Many case maintenance workers also report that, under Jobs First, they are spending more time helping clients develop strategies to address obstacles to employment and find jobs.

On the staff survey, a series of questions asked case maintenance workers to compare their "client assistance work" (defined as helping and advising clients to make good decisions about looking for and taking jobs, getting off welfare, seeking education and other services, and seeking help from social service agencies) with their "financial work" (defined as accurately determining and verifying eligibility and benefits). As shown in Figure 3.7, large majorities of workers in both sites believe that they are doing more client assistance work as a result of Jobs First. (On another question, not shown, most workers said that they do more client assistance work with clients in the Jobs First group.) Most workers also believe that they have the skills necessary to do client assistance work, and that such work is appropriate. Interestingly, despite the elimination of monthly reporting and other changes designed in part to free up workers' time

Table 3.2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Case Maintenance and Intake Workers' Conduct of and Action After Intake and Redetermination Interviews

	Manchester		New Haven	
Percentage of Staff Who:	Case Maintenance Workers	Intake Workers	Case Maintenance Workers	Intake Workers
Are very likely to ask clients about plans to become self-sufficient				
For clients in Jobs First group	82.4	60.0	83.3	53.3
For clients in AFDC group	35.3	30.0	51.7	28.6
Often probe to see what problems may be preventing clients from becoming self-sufficient				
For clients in Jobs First group	70.6	50.0	78.3	33.3
For clients in AFDC group	35.3	30.0	60.0	28.6
Often take action to help resolve problems preventing their clients from becoming self-sufficient				
For clients in Jobs First group	64.7	60.0	76.7	42.9
For clients in AFDC group	29.4	60.0	55.2	38.5
	17	10	60	15

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales and were asked separately with reference to clients in the two research groups. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "very unlikely to ask" (1) to "very likely to ask" (7). Responses for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "very likely to ask." The scales for the second and third questions ranged from "never or very rarely" (1) to "often" (7). In each case, the figures show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

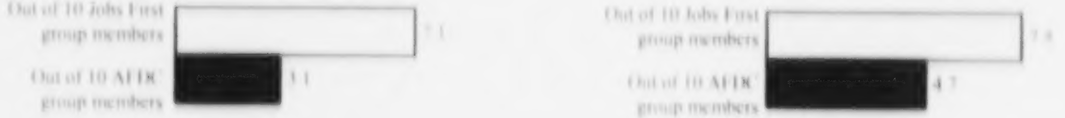
Figure 3.6

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

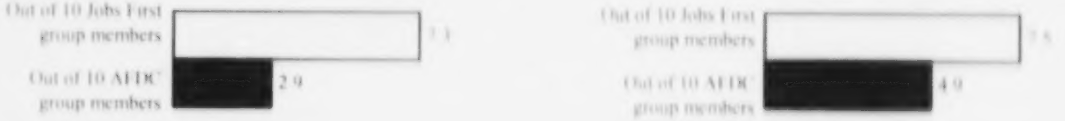
Messages Given to Clients by Case Maintenance Workers Between Redetermination Interviews, by Research Group

Manchester	New Haven

Suppose that the next 10 clients that you have conversations with between redetermination interviews are not working. In how many of the conversations would you talk to the clients about their plans for becoming self-sufficient?



Suppose that the next 10 clients that you have conversations with between redetermination interviews are not working. In how many of the conversations would you talk to the clients about how much of their welfare benefits they could keep if they went to work?



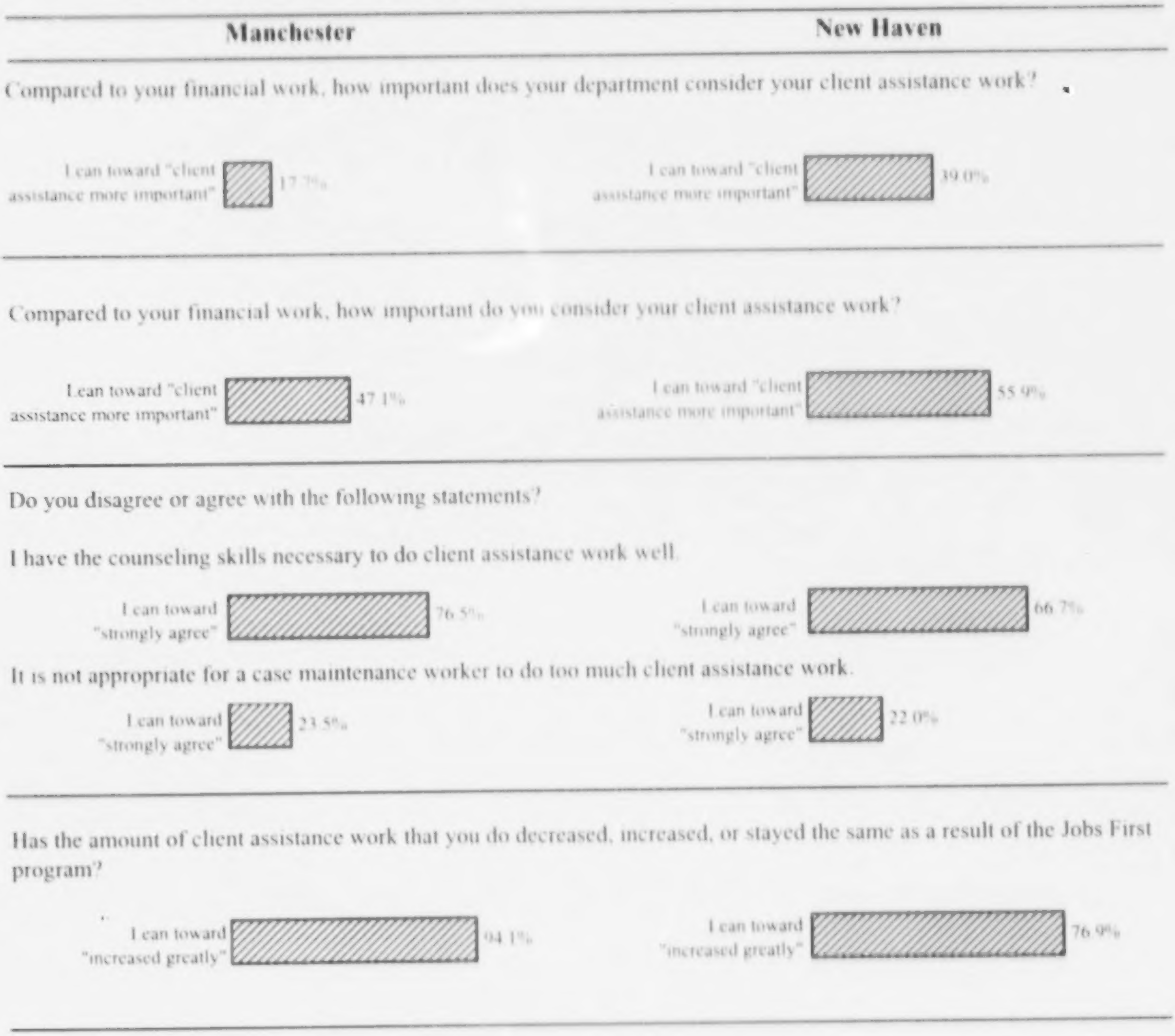
SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 17, New Haven = 60.

NOTE: The bars indicate the average estimated number of conversations in which respondents say they would discuss each issue.

Figure 3.7

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Case Maintenance Workers' Views About Client Assistance Work Under Jobs First



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 17, New Haven = 60.

NOTES: The questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the first question ranged from "client assistance not as important" (1) to "client assistance more important" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "client assistance more important" response. The other questions follow a similar format as the first and also show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

for client assistance work, relatively few case maintenance workers believe that DSS considers client assistance work to be more important than financial work — though about half of all workers in the two sites themselves considered their client assistance work more important.

Although these results may signal important changes in staff roles, they should be seen in context. Workers do not have frequent contact with many of their clients; thus, the client assistance work they do may occur mostly in the context of redetermination appointments or in response to client inquiries. Moreover, as noted earlier, staffing changes often cause clients to be shifted from one worker to another; this may hinder workers from developing close relationships with clients. Finally, on another survey question (not shown), only about a third of case maintenance workers in Manchester and half of those in New Haven reported that their client assistance work is mainly concerned with helping clients achieve self-sufficiency (as opposed to responding to immediate crises, such as evictions or food shortages).

In addition, it is important to note that the survey results suggest that there is a small group of workers in each site who believe that it is not appropriate for eligibility workers to do too much client assistance, and that they do not have the skills necessary for this work. These staff may not be strong candidates for the new FI-Rep position.

3. Limited contact with clients. In considering the data presented above, it is important to note that case maintenance workers do not have very frequent contact with many of their clients. Jobs First clients are only required to attend two redeterminations: one at month 12 and the other at month 20 (the exit interview). (There is also a mandatory appointment at month 6, but only for clients who are neither working nor participating in JSST.)

Staff report that they do not speak to many of their clients between scheduled appointments. For example, in New Haven, most case maintenance workers reported that they had contact with about half their clients — regardless of their research group — between redeterminations. Moreover, as shown in Figure 3.8, large majorities of case maintenance workers in both sites report that most of their contact with clients between interviews is client-initiated; only a very small fraction of workers report often contacting clients to urge them to use available services or take advantage of employment opportunities. This means that workers may have little contact with clients who are unresponsive to Jobs First's policies and who do not contact them. Workers report that their large caseloads prevent them from having much proactive contact with their clients. (As discussed earlier, it also appears that many clients have limited contact with employment services staff, both because these workers have very large caseloads and because of the way the Jobs First employment component is designed.)

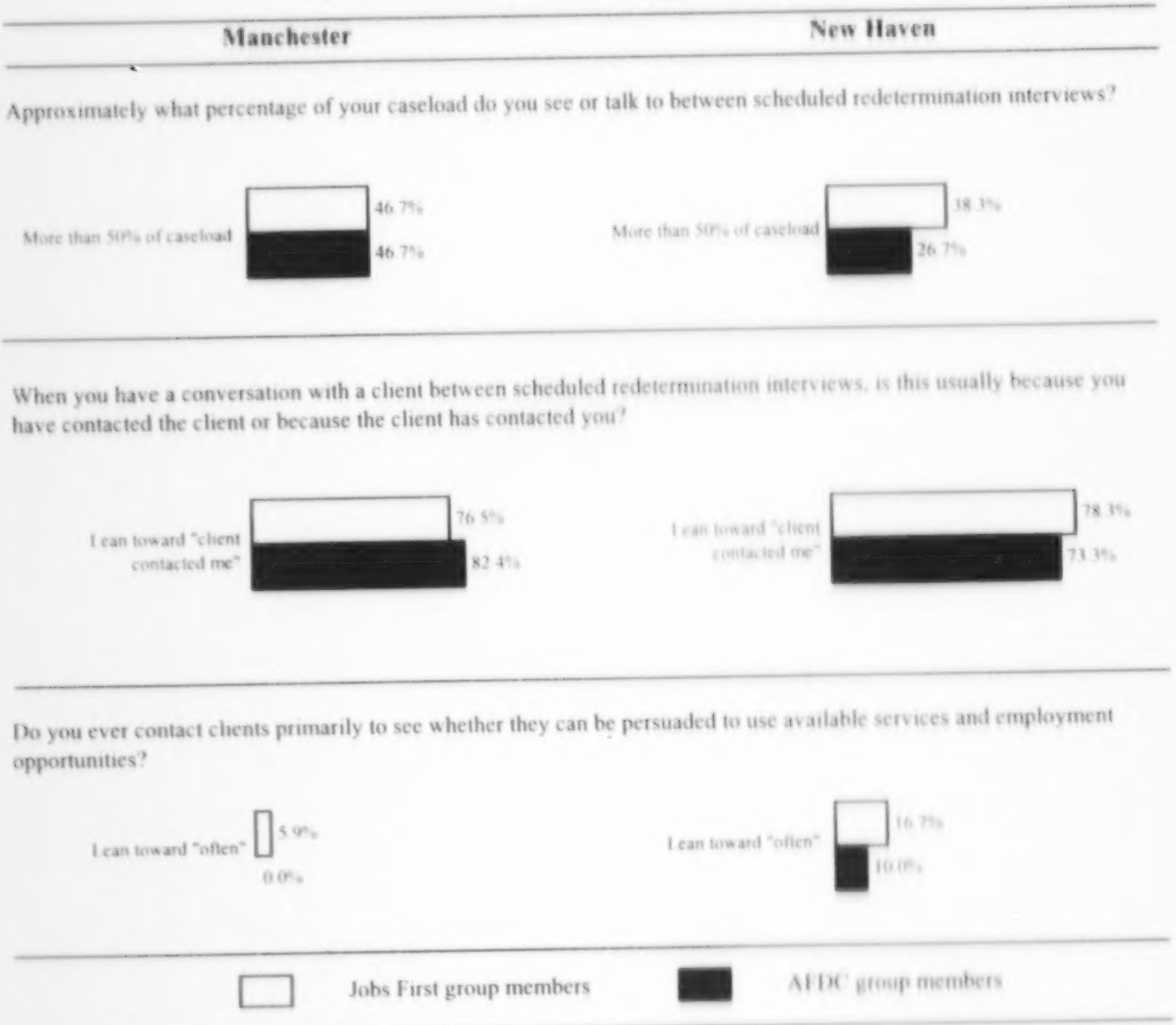
4. How eligibility workers view their new roles. In interviews, eligibility workers have expressed different views about their new roles. Most workers are enthusiastic about having a greater opportunity to help clients, while a few are uncomfortable playing a broader role.

It is interesting to note that many case maintenance workers have expressed ambivalence about the elimination of monthly reporting and the reduced frequency of redeterminations — measures that were intended in part to free up their time for client assistance work. In interviews, many workers used terms like "naked" or "half-dressed" to describe the feeling that they did not know what their clients were doing; many workers assumed that some of their clients were

Figure 3.8

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Case Maintenance Workers' Contacts with Clients



Approximately what percentage of your caseload do you see or talk to between scheduled redetermination interviews?

When you have a conversation with a client between scheduled redetermination interviews, is this usually because you have contacted the client or because the client has contacted you?

Do you ever contact clients primarily to see whether they can be persuaded to use available services and employment opportunities?

Manchester
New Haven
More than 50% of caseload
46.7%
46.7%
More than 50% of caseload
38.3%
26.7%
Lean toward "client contacted me"
76.5%
82.4%
Lean toward "client contacted me"
78.3%
73.3%
Lean toward "often"
5.9%
0.0%
Lean toward "often"
16.7%
10.0%
Jobs First group members
AFDC group members

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from a survey of Connecticut Department of Social Services staff, administered in June 1997. Sample sizes: Manchester = 17, New Haven = 60.

NOTES: The scale for the first question was structured as a range of percentages, from 10 percent to 80 percent and above, in 10 percentage point increments. The bars show the percentage of respondents who circled 60 percent, 70 percent, or 80 percent and above.

The second and third questions were structured in the form of 7-point scales. For example, the scale for the second question ranged from "I contacted client" (1) to "client contacted me" (7). The bars for this question show the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7 and are described as "leaning toward" the "client contacted me" response. The third question follows a similar format as the second and also shows the percentage of respondents who circled 5, 6, or 7.

earning over the poverty level but not reporting this. In the words of one staff person, "We have no control. I would rather do more work than pay taxes for overpayments."

On the staff survey, two-thirds of case maintenance workers in Manchester and more than half in New Haven said that there should be more scheduled contacts with clients in order to meet the goals of Jobs First. In an interview, one worker said, "We may not see clients until Month 12; 11 months of incorrect benefits is absurd."

It is also interesting to note that, despite the absence of monthly reporting, 71 percent of case maintenance workers in Manchester and 58 percent of workers in New Haven reported that the amount of work they need to do on a case increases when the client goes to work and stays on welfare. It is possible that these responses are related to child care: Before mid-1997, many case maintenance workers handled child care payments for their clients.[7] Workers reported that they played this role even when child care staff were available to handle the task because they felt that it helped them monitor their clients' employment; recipients needed to submit pay stubs in order to obtain child care reimbursement.

V. The Client Perspective

In early 1997, MDRC contacted 159 Jobs First and AFDC group members who had been randomly assigned in November and December 1996 in both sites in order to administer a brief telephone survey; respondents were interviewed three to six months after their random assignment date.[8] Because the survey was conducted only by telephone, the completion rate was only about 54 percent.[9] The small sample size and the relatively low completion rate mean caution is required in drawing any firm conclusions from these results. (A similar survey was conducted in 1996, targeting people randomly assigned in March and April 1996; results from that survey, which are quite similar to the results discussed below, were presented in the earlier paper prepared by MDRC.) As discussed in Chapter 1, a larger-scale survey with a higher completion rate is being conducted in 1998; results will be presented in the 1999 interim report.

To learn more about the clients' perspective, MDRC held informal group discussions with a small subsample of participants who had responded either to the 1997 telephone survey or to the 1996 telephone survey. The discussions were held with a total of 18 recipients (divided into four small discussion groups) in June 1997 in both New Haven and Manchester. Like the telephone surveys, the group discussions were designed to determine if participants were aware of the changes to Connecticut's welfare program. Some of the group discussants were working, others were not. The discussions were held before anyone had reached the time limit, so they provide some insight into how clients were thinking about and attempting to prepare for the time limit. Once again, because the sample is small and self-selected, the discussants may not well represent the full Jobs First population.

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[7] Child care was privatized at that point.

[8] Thirteen respondents who did not receive AFDC in the four months prior to the interview are not included in the analysis.

[9] In order to obtain a high completion rate, it is necessary to conduct in-person interviews with sample members who cannot be reached by telephone. The larger-scale surveys conducted as part of the Jobs First evaluation will all include in-person follow-up interviews.

A. Overall Knowledge of Jobs First Policies

Table 3.3 shows the responses to a series of questions designed to assess respondents' awareness of several features of Jobs First. Responses are shown separately for people who were not receiving TFA when interviewed or who were exempt from the Jobs First time limit at that point; it was assumed that these individuals would have less detailed knowledge of the program's policies.

As the table shows, the vast majority of the respondents who were receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit were aware of Jobs First's two main policies: the time limit and the earned income disregard. For example, 100 percent of respondents in Manchester and 92.3 percent of respondents in New Haven said that they were aware that there was a time limit on how long they could receive AFDC/TFA. Large proportions of respondents were also aware of the earned income disregard, transitional Medicaid, and other Jobs First policies.

Awareness of the child support changes and the partial family cap was much less widespread; in fact, however, these policies only affect subsets of recipients.

(Table 1 in the Appendix shows that respondents who are members of the AFDC group were generally aware that the key Jobs First policies do not apply to them. This is an indication that the random assignment research design is intact; that is, that there is still a large "treatment" difference between the two groups.)

The group discussions also asked participants to identify and discuss features of Jobs First. When asked to identify the first thing that comes to mind in thinking about Jobs First, one participant said: "Well, the 20-month time limit and the fact that they say any job, any wage, any hour."

Focus group participants were also aware of the earned income disregard. Some participants reported that the earned income disregard made a difference in their lives. One client said, "It [the income disregard] made me able to pay my bills in full, not a little bit at a time, it made me able to pay my bills like I was supposed to." Others reported that the disregard gave them a false sense of security and expressed concern about being able to support themselves when their benefits ended. One client said, "So all of a sudden you're at 21 months and yesterday you made $200 a week plus your benefits and tomorrow you just make $200 a week. And that's it."

Participants seemed aware of the Jobs First employment services mandates, although there was variation in the perceived value of available employment services. Clients may have scrutinized the quality of the employment services closely owing to a sense of urgency driven by the time limit. When asked to describe the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about Jobs First, one participant said: "The whole forced job issue — that's how it felt to me. I'm probably not saying it right, but they force you to go through what they call the Jobs First program, which to me is such a waste of time. They basically put me in a room and taught me how to fill out an application."

Table 3.3

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Knowledge of Key Features of Jobs First Among Jobs First Group Members at Time of Interview, by Site

	Manchester			New Haven		
Program Features	Exempt or Not Receiving TFA	Receiving TFA and Not Exempt	Full Jobs First Group	Exempt or Not Receiving TFA	Receiving TFA and Not Exempt	Full Jobs First Group
Percentage of Jobs First group members who are aware that:						
There is a time limit on how long I can receive AFDC/TFA	53.3	100.0	81.1	47.1	92.3	74.4
If I have a job, I can keep all of the money from my job and my AFDC/TFA check as long as I am earning below the poverty line	50.0	77.3	66.7	29.4	88.5	65.1
I am required to look for a job or get help looking for a job	42.9	81.8	66.7	41.2	65.4	55.8
I will continue to receive medical benefits for two years after I stop receiving my AFDC/TFA check	64.3	77.3	72.2	58.8	61.5	60.5
I am required to get a picture ID card from the state which will include a digital image of my two index fingers	100.0	100.0	100.0	82.4	96.2	90.7
While I conduct my job search, I can receive some money to help pay for child care and transportation	35.7	54.6	47.2	17.7	61.5	44.2
While I conduct my job search, I am supposed to keep track of the employers that I contact and write down their names and addresses in the Job Search Log	21.4	68.2	50.0	18.8	69.2	50.0
If I'm receiving child support payments, I can keep $100 per month instead of $50	7.1	18.2	13.9	0.0	19.2	11.9
If I have another child while I'm in this program, my AFDC check will only increase by $50, instead of $100 before this program started	21.4	22.7	22.2	6.3	44.0	29.3
Sample size	15	22	37	18	26	44

(continued)

Table 3.3 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a telephone survey of sample members randomly assigned in November and December 1996. Respondents were interviewed three to six months after their random assignment date.

NOTES: People who did not respond to a particular item are excluded from the calculations; the non-response rates for individual items ranged from 0.0 to 11.1 percent.

Exemptions were determined by reviewing the Eligibility Management System for each respondent.

The respondent's AFDC status was determined from the survey, meaning that it was self-reported.

Percentage totals include both "unaided" and "aided" responses. Respondents were asked to name the features of the Jobs First program, and were scored as giving an "unaided response" when they mentioned a policy without an interviewer prompt. Respondents were scored as giving an "aided response" when, after being prompted by the interviewer, they said that a particular policy applied to him or her.

Also owing to the time pressure of the program, participants seemed concerned about the level of communication they had with their case workers. Clients were aware of some administrative constraints that affect the continuity of communication — like realphabetizing caseloads, which usually results in clients being assigned to different workers. One discussant said, "First of all, I haven't even talked to my case worker since I've been on it [welfare], and I've been on since December [1996]. And from December until now they keep switching my case worker."

B. Detailed Knowledge About the Time Limit

Table 3.4 presents responses to several questions asked only of Jobs First group respondents who said they were subject to a time limit. As the table shows, 90 percent of respondents in each site correctly identified the length of the time limit.

When asked what would happen if they reached the time limit, only a minority of clients in both sites said that their check would be canceled. A larger proportion mentioned the possibility of receiving an extension. As noted earlier, DSS materials describing the program are quite explicit in describing the extension policy, although some case maintenance workers reported on the staff survey that they do not discuss extensions with their clients. (The survey did not explicitly ask whether clients knew that extensions were possible.)

While all of the focus group discussants were aware of a time limit, they were less consistently aware of the extension policy. Some discussants had heard about the six-month extensions, but few knew how extensions would be granted, who would be eligible for them, and what criteria DSS would use to determine eligibility for an extension. One participant thought DSS would grant six-month extensions only under "special circumstances"; another participant said, "I think someone has to be near death or maimed [to receive an extension]."

Some participants seemed confused about the nature of the time limit. One individual, not fully aware of the extension policy, said that she wanted to "bank" her time. When asked if she thought the state would really end people's benefits at 21 months, she said: "I'm kinda hoping to lose my grant before then — if that makes any sense." When the facilitator asked for clarification by saying, "You mean you're hoping to get in a situation where you don't have to use it?" the client said, "Right. In case I ever have to go back on. Because this is a 21-month lifetime limit."

C. Attitudes About the Time Limit

Table 3.5 presents responses to several questions asked only of respondents who said they had a time limit. Interestingly, a substantial percentage (83 percent in Manchester and 59 percent in New Haven) do not think they will reach the time limit without finding a job. However, at the same time, over half the respondents (53 percent in Manchester and 69 percent in New Haven) are very concerned that they will not be able to support their family if they reach the time limit. This disparity may relate to the quality of jobs respondents believe they can obtain. (On the staff survey, 60 percent of case maintenance workers in New Haven — but only 20 percent in Manchester — said that they believed that many clients would be hurt by the time limit policy.)

These data also suggest that New Haven respondents may be more likely to be changing their behavior in response to the time limit: Almost two-thirds said that the time limit makes

Table 3.4

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Knowledge About the Time Limit Among Jobs First Group Members Who Said They Were Subject to a Time Limit, by Site

Knowledge or Belief (%)	Manchester	New Haven
How did you find out about the time limit for receiving AFDC/TFA?[a]		
Welfare office/staff at welfare office	83.3	75.0
Family/friends	0.0	3.1
Letter from the state	20.0	21.9
TV/newspaper/radio	6.7	3.1
Other	3.3	6.3
How long is your time limit?		
21 months	90.0	90.3
24 months	6.7	0.0
Another amount	3.3	9.7
Don't know	0.0	0.0
What will the welfare department do if you use up all the months and reach the time limit?[a]		
My check will be canceled	23.3	34.4
I may get an extension	40.0	37.5
I'll be required to get a job	0.0	6.3
I'll get some help with getting a job	3.3	3.1
I'll be required to attend education and training classes	0.0	3.1
Other	3.3	9.4
Don't know	36.7	9.4
Nothing	3.3	3.1
Sample size	30	32

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a telephone survey of sample members randomly assigned in November and December 1996. Respondents were interviewed three to six months after their random assignment date.

NOTES: People who did not respond to a particular item are excluded from the calculations; the non-response rate for individual items ranged from 0.0 to 3.1 percent.

[a] Because respondents could give more than one response, the responses total more than 100 percent.

Table 3.5

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Attitudes About the Time Limit Among Jobs First Group Members Who Said They Were Subject to a Time Limit, by Site

Attitude or Opinion (%)	Manchester	New Haven
How likely do you think it is that you will reach the time limit without finding a job?		
Very likely	10.0	15.6
Somewhat likely	3.3	15.6
Not very likely	83.3	59.4
Don't know	3.3	9.4
Are you concerned or not about being able to support your family, if you reach the time limit for receiving AFDC/TFA?		
Yes, very concerned	53.3	68.8
Yes, somewhat concerned	20.0	15.6
No, not very concerned	26.7	15.6
Does the time limit make you more likely to do any of the following now?[a]		
Work part-time or full-time	33.3	65.6
Look for a job/get help looking for a job	30.0	53.1
Get education or training	13.3	28.1
Get child support	23.3	40.6
Other	6.7	3.1
Sample size	30	32

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a telephone survey of sample members randomly assigned in November and December 1996. Respondents were interviewed three to six months after their random assignment date.

NOTES: [a]Because respondents could give more than one response, the responses total more than 100 percent.

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them more likely to work. Interestingly, these responses are consistent with the perceptions of staff, as expressed on the staff survey. New Haven workers were much more likely to say that reminding a client about the time limit was an effective way to increase her or his motivation.

Finally, one question on the client survey (not shown) asked whether respondents felt that it is fair or unfair to limit the amount of time people can receive welfare. About 75 percent of Manchester respondents said that they felt it was fair; in New Haven, just under 40 percent responded with "fair," while 30 percent said that "it depends."

In summary, based on the small telephone survey and informal group discussions, participants seemed to be familiar with Jobs First policies and mandates, including the time limit and the earned income disregard. Furthermore, while many participants expressed concern about being able to support their family if their benefits did end, most were hopeful that one day their reliance on state assistance would end. During a group discussion, when asked if they felt confident about providing for their family without welfare, one participant said, "I'm confident. You know why? Because I got the willpower and I want to be somebody. I want people to look up to me, and I could help the next person and tell them what they could do [if they were in] my shoes, you know, set an example for my son to want things, to be somebody."

Chapter 4

The Jobs First Time Limit

This chapter examines the early implementation of the Jobs First time limit policy. It focuses on the experiences of Jobs First group members during the period before and at the end of the 21-month time limit. The first section of the chapter gives a brief overview of the pre-time limit review process. The second section examines data for an early cohort of enrollees and gives a preliminary sense of how quickly people are using up their months of benefits and reaching the time limit and what is happening when they get there. The third section describes how the review process is being implemented in the research sites; it helps to explain why the pattern of early results looks as it does. The fourth and fifth sections focus on clients who receive and do not receive extensions, discussing the special services that are available to each group.

As with the previous chapters, the same geographical caveat applies: While the policies discussed in this chapter have been implemented statewide, MDRC's observations have been limited to New Haven and Manchester, which collectively represent about one-fourth of the state's welfare caseload. The time limit review process may operate differently elsewhere. In addition, owing to this paper's timing, the discussion reflects only the first few months of experience with the review process, a period when staff were still learning to implement the new rules.

I. Overview of the Pre-Time Limit Review Process

As discussed earlier, Jobs First includes provisions for six-month extensions of TFA benefits under certain circumstances. The key step in determining whether a client will receive an extension is the exit interview, which is scheduled to occur during each client's 20th month of benefit receipt.[1] Exit interviews are conducted by case maintenance workers; in some cases, employment services workers also participate.

As illustrated in Figure 4.1, workers assess each case by asking four basic questions. Depending on the answers to these questions, the recipient's TFA benefits may or may not be continued.

1. **Is the client eligible for an exemption?** Even though the recipient may not have previously been exempt from Jobs First, new conditions may have arisen that qualify her for an exemption. Alternatively, a situation that qualifies the client for an exemption may have existed for some time without being identified. If a client is exempted, her time limit "clock" is suspended.
2. **Is the client's family income above the welfare payment standard?** If income is equal to or greater than the payment standard, the individual is not eligible for an extension. (Table 1.1 showed the payment standard for several

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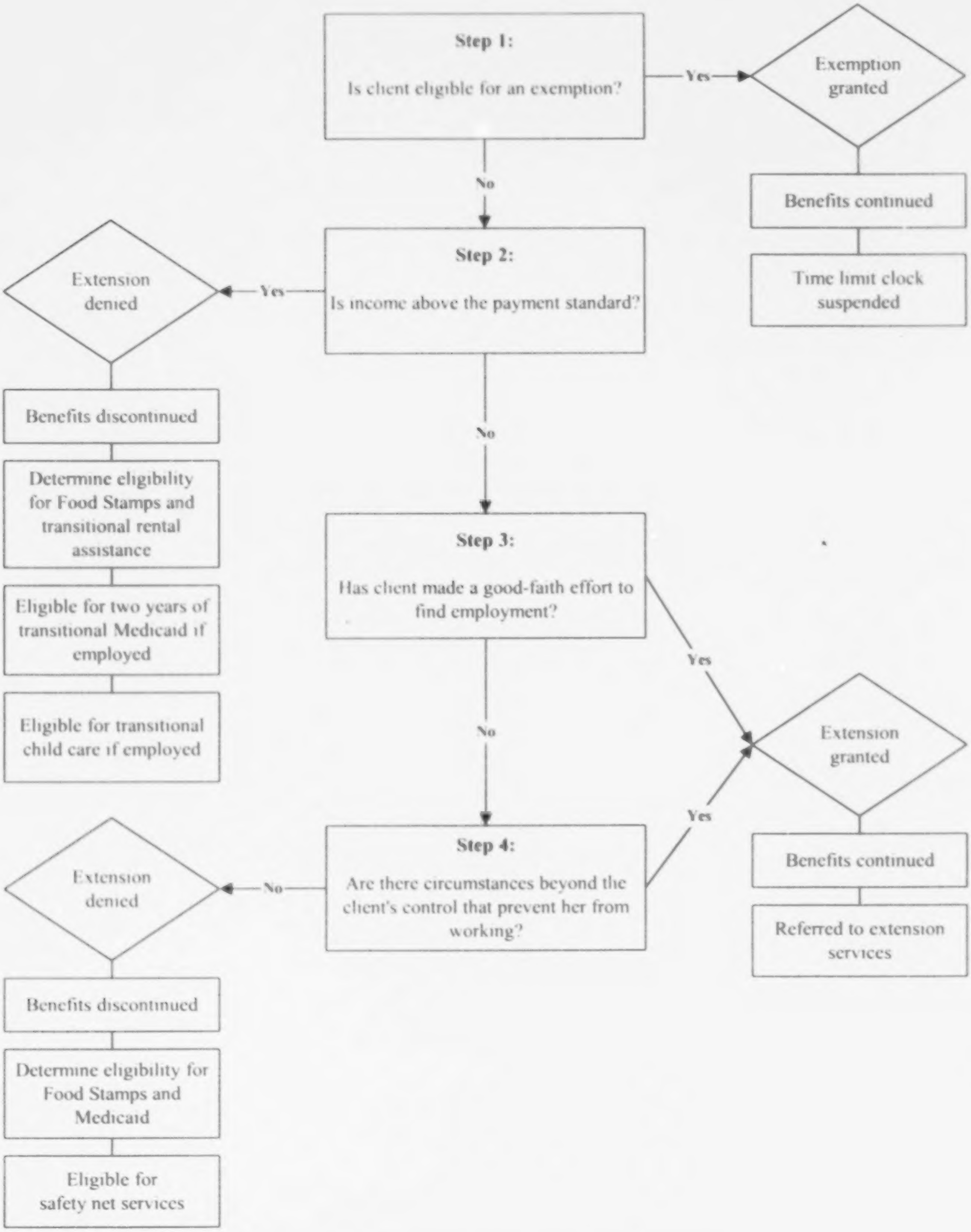
[1] More precisely, the interview is scheduled during the 20th *countable* month of benefit receipt. Months of benefit receipt while an exemption applies do not count toward the time limit.

Figure 4.1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Simplified Illustration of the Jobs First 20-Month Exit Interview Process


Step 1:
Is client eligible for an exemption?
Yes
Exemption granted
Benefits continued
Time limit clock suspended
No
Step 2:
Is income above the payment standard?
Yes
Extension denied
Benefits discontinued
Determine eligibility for Food Stamps and transitional rental assistance
Eligible for two years of transitional Medicaid if employed
Eligible for transitional child care if employed
No
Step 3:
Has client made a good-faith effort to find employment?
Yes
Extension granted
Benefits continued
Referred to extension services
No
Step 4:
Are there circumstances beyond the client's control that prevent her from working?
Yes
No
Extension denied
Benefits discontinued
Determine eligibility for Food Stamps and Medicaid
Eligible for safety net services

SOURCE: Connecticut Department of Social Services policy and procedure information.

family sizes.) Most likely she will receive two years of transitional Medicaid coverage, and she may be eligible for Food Stamps, subsidized child care, and temporary rental assistance. In addition, clients who are denied an extension for this reason may request an extension at a later date if their income declines.

3. **Has the client made a good-faith effort to find employment?** If income is below the payment standard, staff review the client's record of cooperation with Jobs First mandates. If the client record indicates that the client has followed the rules of the program, she is considered to have made a good-faith effort and is granted an extension. She may then be referred for employment services designed to help her find a job or increase her hours of employment.

4. **Are there circumstances beyond the client's control that prevent her from working?** If the client record shows a lack of good-faith effort, the participant can still qualify for an extension if she has a current situation beyond her control which limits her ability to work. Circumstances beyond someone's control include prolonged illness, a disaster such as a flood or fire, loss of housing, or domestic violence. If there are no such circumstances, the client is denied an extension, her case is closed, and she is referred for safety net services. She will likely be eligible for Food Stamps and Medicaid.

Several aspects of this process were affected by the package of program changes enacted by the state legislature in June 1997. Most important, the legislature created Individual Performance Contracts (IPCs), which provide an opportunity for clients who are in danger of losing their benefits owing to lack of a good-faith effort to "restore" their compliance before reaching the time limit. It also established safety net services for families that lose TFA benefits and are earning below the payment standard, along with temporary rental assistance for families who lose TFA benefits and are earning above the payment standard.

Clients must communicate with their worker (i.e., show up for a 20-month interview) in order to be eligible for an extension; clients who fail to attend their scheduled exit interview do not receive extensions in absentia. However, since the exit interview is usually scheduled for the middle of month 20, a client has several weeks to contact her worker and reschedule the interview before cash assistance is terminated. Failing to contact DSS before the end of the 21st month can result in an interruption of other benefits as well: Food Stamps are discontinued, and transitional Medicaid begins only if the client is earning income.

II. How Quickly Are Jobs First Group Members Reaching the Time Limit and How Many Are Receiving Extensions?

Although it is too early to draw any firm conclusions about the number of Jobs First recipients who will have their benefits terminated and the number who will receive an extension of their benefits, this section examines a small group of early enrollees to obtain some preliminary information about: 1) how quickly people are using up their months of benefits; and 2) what is happening to cases that reach the time limit.

To examine these issues, MDRC chose a random subsample of 218 single-parent Jobs First group members (163 from New Haven and 55 from Manchester) who were randomly assigned between January 1 and March 31, 1996 — the first three months of program operations. (The sample includes about one-third of all single-parent cases randomly assigned to the Jobs First group during this period.) The status of each case in February 1998 was examined using data from Connecticut's Eligibility Management System (EMS). Depending upon when the client entered the program (January, February, or March 1996), the information provides a snapshot of their situation 25, 24, or 23 months after enrollment.[2] Most cases randomly assigned in January 1996 would have received their final benefit check in October or November 1997 if they received benefits continuously for 21 months and did not receive an extension.[3]

A. How Quickly Are Clients Reaching the Time Limit?

Figure 4.2 depicts the status of the 218 early enrollees in February 1998. It shows that about 73 percent had not used up all 21 months of their time clock by that point. These clients had either left welfare, at least temporarily, or had been granted an exemption that stopped their time limit clock.[4] The figure shows that most of these clients were not receiving TFA benefits in February 1998; others received benefits but were exempt from the time limit. The clients who were receiving benefits and were *not* exempt must have left welfare at some point and then returned; their clocks were running in February 1998. Figure 1 in the Appendix shows how many months of the clock these clients had used.

About 27 percent of the clients had reached the time limit by February 1998; these people received benefits continuously or nearly continuously for 21 months after entering the program. Although direct comparisons are difficult, it appears that Jobs First clients are using up their months of benefits considerably faster than clients in Florida's Family Transition Program, another early time limit program. This is not surprising, because the Jobs First earned income disregard allows many people to continue receiving benefits after they find jobs.[5]

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[2] Because the time limit clock begins with the first full month of benefits issued after random assignment/enrollment, the follow-up period excludes the month of random assignment.

[3] Ongoing recipients randomly assigned in January 1996 during a redetermination appointment would probably have had their time limit clocks started in March 1996, and would have reached the time limit in November 1997 if they received benefits continuously for 21 months. Applicants randomly assigned in January 1996 would probably have had their clocks started in February 1996, and would have reached the time limit in October 1997, assuming continuous benefit receipt.

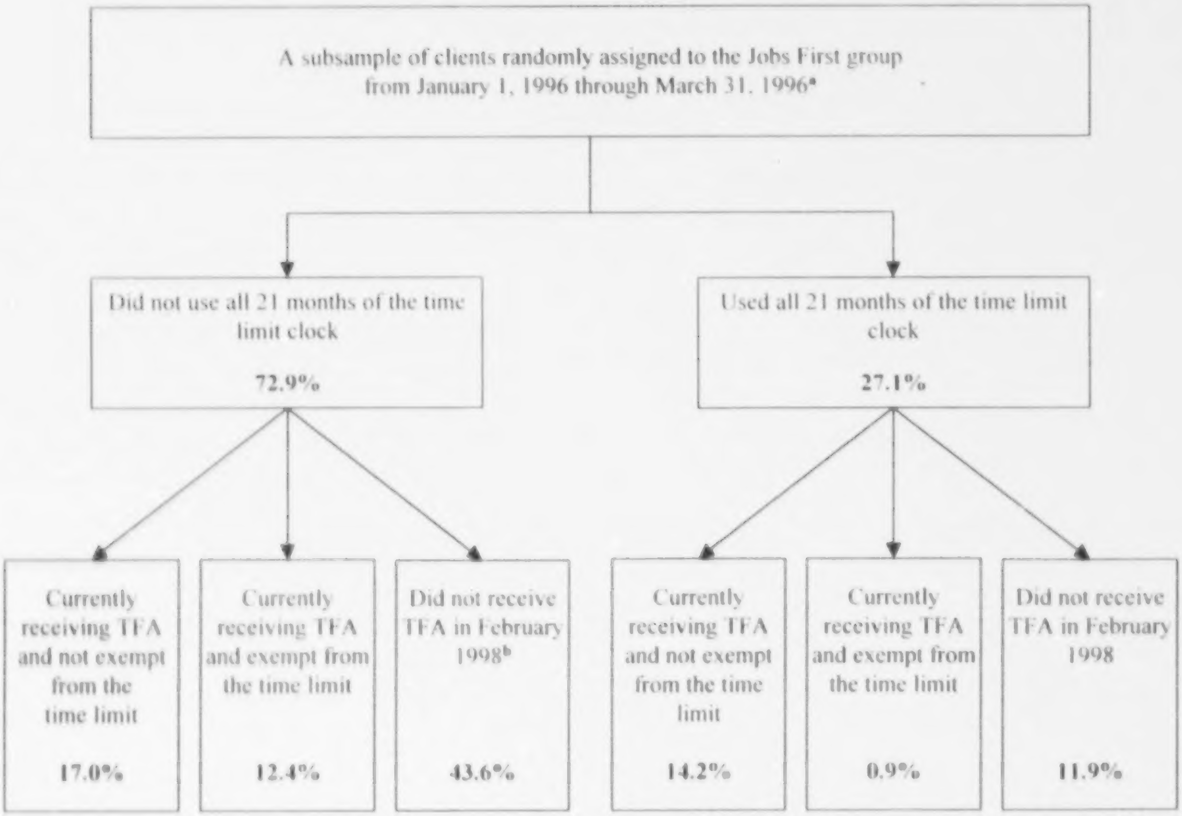
[4] Some of these individuals never received welfare; their initial application for benefits was denied or withdrawn.

[5] FTP participants are assigned to either a 24-month time limit or a 36-month time limit, depending on their characteristics. Data from an MDRC evaluation show that about 9 percent of those assigned a 24-month time limit and 16 percent of those with a 36-month time limit used up all of their months without leaving welfare. (See Dan Bloom et al., *The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program* [New York: MDRC, 1998].) However, many of the clients who are exempt from FTP's time limit are not part of the research sample, as they are in Connecticut. If exempt clients were removed from the Connecticut sample, the proportion of people reaching the time limit would be greater than 27 percent.

Figure 4.2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Status in February 1998 of Single-Parent Jobs First Group Members Randomly Assigned from January 1996 through March 1996


A subsample of clients randomly assigned to the Jobs First group from January 1, 1996 through March 31, 1996[a]
Did not use all 21 months of the time limit clock
72.9%
Used all 21 months of the time limit clock
27.1%
Currently receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit
17.0%
Currently receiving TFA and exempt from the time limit
12.4%
Did not receive TFA in February 1998[b]
43.6%
Currently receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit
14.2%
Currently receiving TFA and exempt from the time limit
0.9%
Did not receive TFA in February 1998
11.9%

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Connecticut Eligibility Management System (EMS) data.

NOTES: The sample includes 218 people, about one-third of all cases assigned to the Jobs First group during this period. All percentages in this figure are based on these 218 cases. See Figure 1 in the Appendix for a further breakdown of this sample.

[a] Two sample members were dropped because they were erroneously treated as members of the AFDC group.

[b] Two cases in this category attended exit interviews in Month 20 and were found to have income over the federal poverty level, making them ineligible for TFA. Both cases were canceled after Month 20.

As the figure shows, over half of the clients who had reached the time limit were receiving TFA benefits in February 1998. In most cases, this was because the client had received a six-month extension. The next section provides a more detailed explanation of the pattern of extensions.

B. What Fraction of Clients Are Receiving Extensions?

The static snapshot in Figure 4.2 is useful, but it masks the dynamic nature of many of the cases that have reached the time limit. Thus, Figure 4.3 focuses *only* on the 27 percent of cases in the subsample that had reached the limit as of February 1998.

1. Initial determinations. As Figure 4.3 shows, about half the cases that reached the time limit were initially granted extensions. Some of these clients may have missed their original scheduled 20-month exit interview, but all of them came into the office before the end of month 21, allowing them to avoid an interruption in their benefits.

As the figure shows, most of the extensions were granted because the client had income below the payment standard and was deemed to have made a good-faith effort to find employment. A few recipients were granted an extension because it was determined that circumstances beyond the client's control prevented her from working; however, a close examination of these cases indicates that several of them may have been miscoded in EMS. (Although it is impossible to give a precise estimate, it appears that most of these clients were actually deemed to have made a good-faith effort.)

About half of the clients who reached the time limit were denied extensions and had their benefits discontinued after the 21st month. Most of these clients attended an exit interview and were denied an extension because their income exceeded the payment standard. A much smaller number were canceled because they did not attend an exit interview. Only one client in the subsample was denied an extension for lack of a good-faith effort. A further review of the cases that were denied extensions because they did not attend an exit interview found that most had earnings recorded in EMS during their final month of assistance, indicating that they were working (although, as noted earlier, this information may have been out of date).

Finally, a small number of clients were granted exemptions just as they reached the time limit; their time limit clocks were stopped at that point.

2. Subsequent changes. The bottom section of Figure 4.3 shows the February 1998 status of the cases that had reached the time limit by this point; this is essentially the same information that was shown in Figure 4.2.[6]

As Figure 4.3 shows, several of the cases that were initially denied extensions had returned to the TFA rolls by February 1998; these clients were off welfare for one to three months. Most of these clients were initially denied extensions because they had income over the payment

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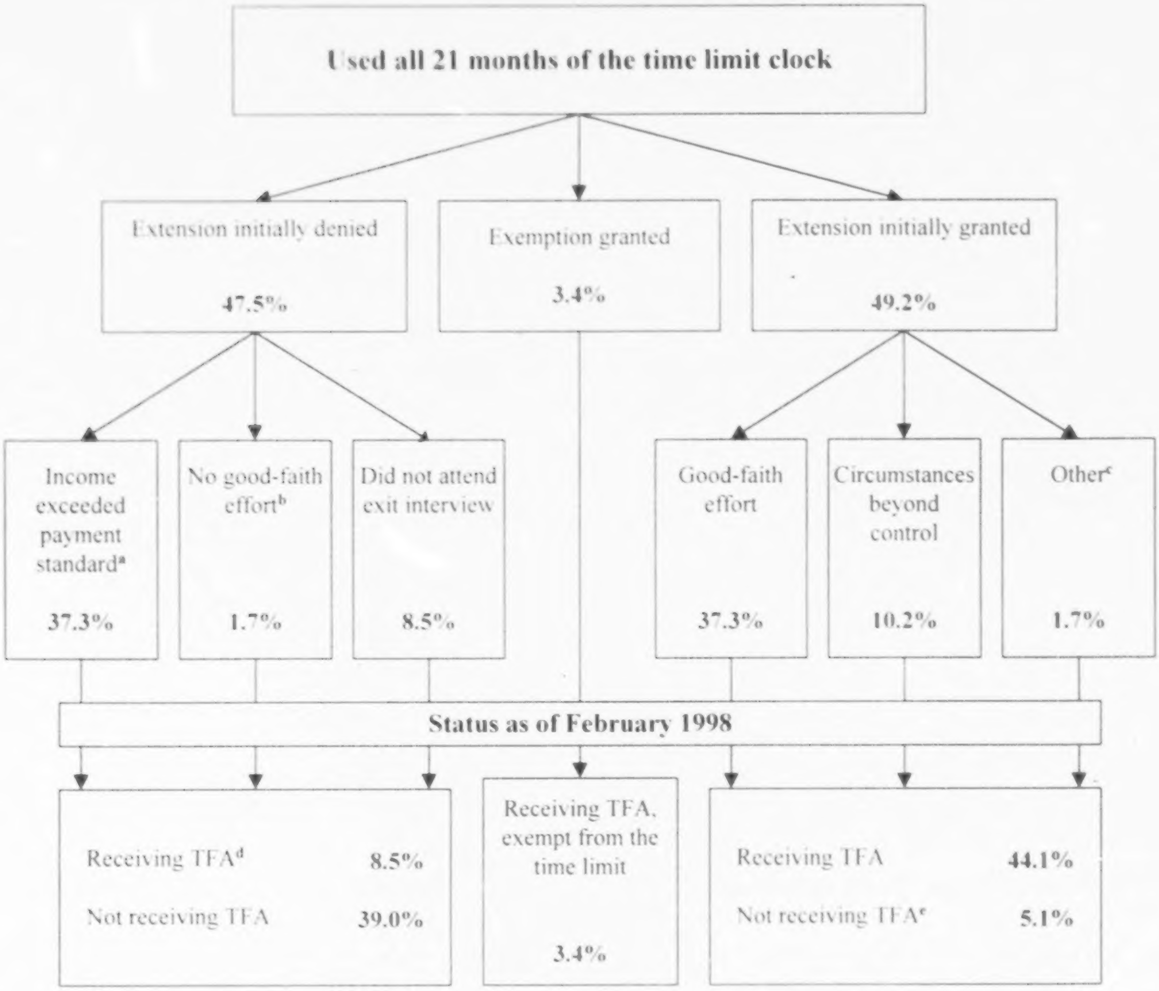
[6] The two groups of cases labeled "Receiving TFA" in the bottom section of Figure 4.3 correspond to the cases labeled "Currently receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit" in the right-hand panel of Figure 4.2. Similarly, the two groups labeled "Not receiving TFA" in Figure 4.3 correspond to the cases labeled "Did not receive TFA in February 1998" in Figure 4.2. The percentages differ because the two figures use different bases (Figure 4.2 included all 218 cases in the sample, while Figure 4.3 focuses only on those cases that had reached the time limit).

Figure 4.3

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Status of Single-Parent Jobs First Group Members Randomly Assigned from January 1996 through March 1996 Who Had Reached the Jobs First Time Limit as of February 1998


Used all 21 months of the time limit clock
Extension initially denied 47.5%
Exemption granted 3.4%
Extension initially granted 49.2%
Income exceeded payment standard[a] 37.3%
No good-faith effort[b] 1.7%
Did not attend exit interview 8.5%
Good-faith effort 37.3%
Circumstances beyond control 10.2%
Other[c] 1.7%
Status as of February 1998
Receiving TFA[d] 8.5%
Not receiving TFA 39.0%
Receiving TFA, exempt from the time limit 3.4%
Receiving TFA 44.1%
Not receiving TFA[e] 5.1%

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Connecticut Eligibility Management System (EMS) data.

NOTES: The sample includes 59 people who had reached the time limit by February 1998. All percentages in this figure are based on these 59 cases. See Figure 2 in the Appendix for the specific numbers corresponding to the percentages in this figure.

[a] Several of the cases in this category were coded in EMS as not requesting an extension. However, the case narrative clearly indicated that the client attended the exit interview and was found to be "over income." One client in this category did not attend an exit interview because she was working; her worker determined her income during a telephone interview.

[b] The one client in this category was initially denied an extension because she failed to show up for an exit interview. She applied for an extension a few days after the end of Month 21 and was denied for lack of good-faith effort.

[c] No extension reason was coded for this case.

[d] These five cases were off TFA for one to three months. Three were initially denied extensions because they had income over the payment standard and were later granted extensions for good-faith effort (i.e., after their income dropped). One was denied initially for having income over the payment standard and was then granted an extension for circumstances beyond control. The fifth case was denied for not showing up at her exit interview and then granted an extension for good-faith effort.

[e] Two of these three cases were canceled for failing to comply with employment services mandates during the extension; the other became ineligible for TFA.

standard, but shortly thereafter they experienced a decline in their income and returned to the DSS office to request an extension. Because these clients were deemed to have made a good-faith effort to find employment (i.e., they had no history of noncompliance and had not quit their jobs without "good cause" or been fired for willful misconduct), the extension was granted. A smaller number of clients were initially denied because they failed to show up for their exit interview, but they later appeared to request the extension and had it granted.[7]

Conversely, three of the cases that were initially granted extensions were no longer receiving TFA in February 1998. Two of the three cases were canceled during the extension because the client failed to comply with employment services mandates. The other case had a status change and lost eligibility for TFA.

C. What Are the Characteristics of the Clients Who Are Reaching the Time Limit?

MDRC examined data from Background Information Forms (BIFs), discussed in Chapter 1, to obtain some preliminary information about which types of clients are reaching the time limit quickly. This analysis compared the characteristics of the 27 percent of clients in the subsample who had reached the time limit by February 1998 with those of the 73 percent who could have reached the time limit but had not.

Not surprisingly, a substantially higher proportion of the sample members who reached the time limit had reported, at the time of random assignment, that they had received AFDC for more than five years on their own or a spouse's case. Also, a slightly higher proportion reported that as a child they had resided in a household that received AFDC for at least five years.

Sample members who had reached the time limit were also more likely to report that they had two or more children at the point of random assignment, and that they had never been married.[8]

D. Cautionary Notes

The data presented above are not definitive. They are based on a subsample; results for the whole sample in the research sites may be different. Moreover, the analysis examined the first cases reaching the time limit, and it is apparent that some workers did not understand how cases should be coded in EMS during this early period. (In some cases, it was necessary to consult the case narrative in order to determine the reason why an extension had been granted or denied.) Finally, as Figure 4.3 clearly shows, an analysis of this kind is sensitive to the time period in which data are collected; if the snapshot had been taken in March instead of February, the results almost certainly would have been different.

The data in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 are similar in some respects to the information contained in recent statewide reports produced by DSS. For example, a DSS report for January 1998 showed that 58 percent of extension requests were granted. The report also showed that almost all of the clients who were denied extensions had income over the payment standard, and that almost all of the extensions that were granted were for a good-faith effort.

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[7] In all, there were five cases in the subsample that were initially denied extensions but were receiving TFA in February 1998 — three in New Haven and two in Manchester.

[8] It is important to note that larger families are more likely to reach the time limit because such families would need to earn more in order to become ineligible for TFA before reaching the limit; the federal poverty level income limit varies by family size.

However, the data in MDRC's report differ from the DSS data in other respects. Most important, the DSS information suggests that a large proportion of clients do not request extensions, either because they fail to attend an exit interview or because they attend the interview but do not request an extension. For example, the January 1998 report showed that 2,029 exit interviews had been scheduled statewide during the month, but only 1,190 extensions had been requested. This implies that the 839 clients who did not request extensions had their benefits discontinued. When these clients are combined with those whose extension requests were denied, the implication is that only about one-third of the clients who reached the time limit received extensions. Whereas, as noted earlier, the MDRC data show that more than half the clients who reached the time limit received exemptions or extensions, that relatively few people had their benefits canceled because they did not attend an exit interview, and that no one who attended an exit interview did not request an extension.

This discrepancy appears to result from two main factors. First, because of a technical issue involving EMS coding, the DSS reports appear to be overstating the number of clients who do not attend exit interviews. Second, the DSS report is based on data entered into EMS by line staff, and in some of the subsample cases that did not receive extensions, MDRC found that the worker had entered a code indicating that a client did not request an extension. However, in reviewing the narrative for these cases, it was clear that the client had attended the exit interview and, after discussing her employment situation with the worker, realized that she could not qualify for an extension. Although this client may have technically not requested an extension, MDRC coded these cases as having been denied because income was over the payment standard.

III. The 20-Month Exit Interview

Drawing on interviews with staff and a mini-case file review, this section describes the early implementation of the 20-month exit interview process in the research sites.[9] After a brief check of the accuracy of a client's time counter, the exit interview is organized around the four questions described at the beginning of the chapter: 1) Is the client eligible for an exemption? 2) Is the client's family income above the welfare payment standard? 3) Has the client made a good-faith effort to find employment? 4) Are there circumstances beyond the client's control that prevent her from working? In addition, the worker redetermines eligibility for Food Stamps and Medicaid and makes the appropriate referrals to other benefits and services.

A. Determining Whether an Exemption Applies

At the beginning of the exit interview, workers are instructed to review the exemption criteria with each client, and to have the client sign a form that indicates whether she wants to request an exemption.

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[9] MDRC selected 25 cases that had been granted extensions at the time limit and discussed these cases with the corresponding case maintenance and employment services workers.

In interviews with MDRC, staff mostly discussed issues involving clients who request an exemption for incapacitation; these requests must be approved by a centralized Medical Review Team (MRT). DSS policy states that if an exemption request is already pending with MRT when the exit interview occurs, staff should grant the exemption pending the outcome. However, staff reported that some clients do not request an exemption until they show up at the exit interview. Moreover, although the letter scheduling the exit interview tells the client to bring a physician's statement if she intends to request such an exemption, some clients do not bring this documentation. Staff reported that they will typically give such a client about one week to provide a physician's statement that says she is unable to work; if the client provides appropriate documentation, the worker will grant the exemption (or an extension) until the results of the MRT review are available.

Some staff noted that the documentation for an exemption for incapacitation can be complex, and that clients with certain kinds of mental health problems may have difficulty following through. As one worker commented: "We're asking for very complex verification from a person who is trying to prove she can't verify things."

Staff also noted that there are clients who appear to be "low functioning" or to have mental health problems that could prevent them from succeeding in the workplace, but who probably would not be approved for exemptions because they are not truly incapacitated. One worker commented that these clients are often long-term recipients who have learned to function within the welfare system but are unprepared for self-sufficiency: "It's one thing to do everything your worker asks you to do. It's something else to function in the pressure of a workplace. Some of these clients can't handle a workplace. But they probably won't get an exemption, either."

Workers noted that these clients' problems seem to surface when they are under pressure — such as when confronted with the reality of leaving welfare. (Some employment services workers also commented that such problems may not be identified before the time limit because their large caseloads hinder them from working intensively with their clients.) Some staff predicted that some of these clients might never find jobs paying above the payment standard, particularly if they have several children (and, thus, a higher payment standard). The question is whether they will be able to comply with program requirements sufficiently to avoid losing their benefits during an extension, when any noncompliance with employment services mandates without "good cause" may result in permanent benefit discontinuance.

B. Measuring Income

If no exemption applies, the next step for staff is to determine whether the client's income is above the welfare payment standard. Workers generally measure income by examining recent paystubs or other relevant records; many workers reported that they contact employers to verify earned income. (A $90 work expense allowance is deducted from each employed client's earnings when calculating the family's countable monthly income.)

As mentioned in Chapter 3, staff report that the earnings information recorded in EMS is sometimes out of date by the time the client attends the exit interview: Many clients who were assumed to be working report that they are no longer employed. As mentioned earlier, this occurs in large part because there are few incentives for clients to inform staff when they lose jobs; their benefits are generally not affected. However, as discussed below, when a client reports that she no longer has the job EMS reports she has, it raises the question of whether she quit the job without "good cause" or was fired for willful misconduct during the last six months of assistance. If this is discovered to have been the case, the client is assumed not to have made a good-faith effort to find employment (but she must be offered the opportunity to restore compliance through an IPC — see below).

If the client's countable income is equal to or greater than the payment standard, the client is considered "over income" and is not eligible for an extension. If this occurs, the client is likely to be eligible for two years of transitional Medicaid, since this benefit is provided to anyone who is employed at the point their case closes.

"Over income" clients may be eligible for Food Stamps as well, but this is not always the case. While clients are in Jobs First, their cash assistance grants are counted as income in determining their Food Stamp benefits. However, the enhanced earned income disregard applies to the Food Stamp grant calculation — so all earnings are disregarded as long as the client is earning below the federal poverty level. At the time limit, if a client loses her cash grant, the TFA grant amount is no longer counted against her Food Stamp benefits, which should result in a higher Food Stamps level. At the same time, however, the client also loses the earned income disregard and her earnings begin to be counted in the Food Stamp calculation (after a standard 20 percent disregard), which should result in a lower Food Stamp level.[10] These two changes work in opposite directions: One drives Food Stamps up, the other drives them down. For many clients, the result is a Food Stamp benefit that is lower than their benefit before the time limit.

Figure 4.4 provides two examples of the "cliff" in monthly family income for clients whose benefits are discontinued because their income is above the payment standard. These examples, one with earnings just above the payment standard and the other with earnings just below the poverty level, illustrate the sharp decrease in monthly income that can occur at the end of the time limit. In the first scenario (a parent working part-time at $6.25/hr), the family loses $542 of income. In the second scenario (a parent working full time at $6.25/hr), the family loses $689. As the figure shows, the parent working full-time experiences a sharp decline in her Food Stamp benefit amount; the loss of the earned income disregard — and the corresponding increase in the amount of earnings counted in the calculation — more than offsets the fact that her income from cash assistance has declined.

For comparison's sake, the figure also illustrates how much income the family would have under traditional AFDC rules. It shows that the parent working full-time would be ineligible for cash assistance under traditional rules, and thus would have the same income as the Jobs First client after her grant was discontinued; the parent working part-time would be eligible for a small cash grant under traditional rules. The horizontal line shows that, under any of the scenarios, the working parents would all have more income than a parent who was receiving welfare and not working — although expenses might also be lower for a nonworking parent.

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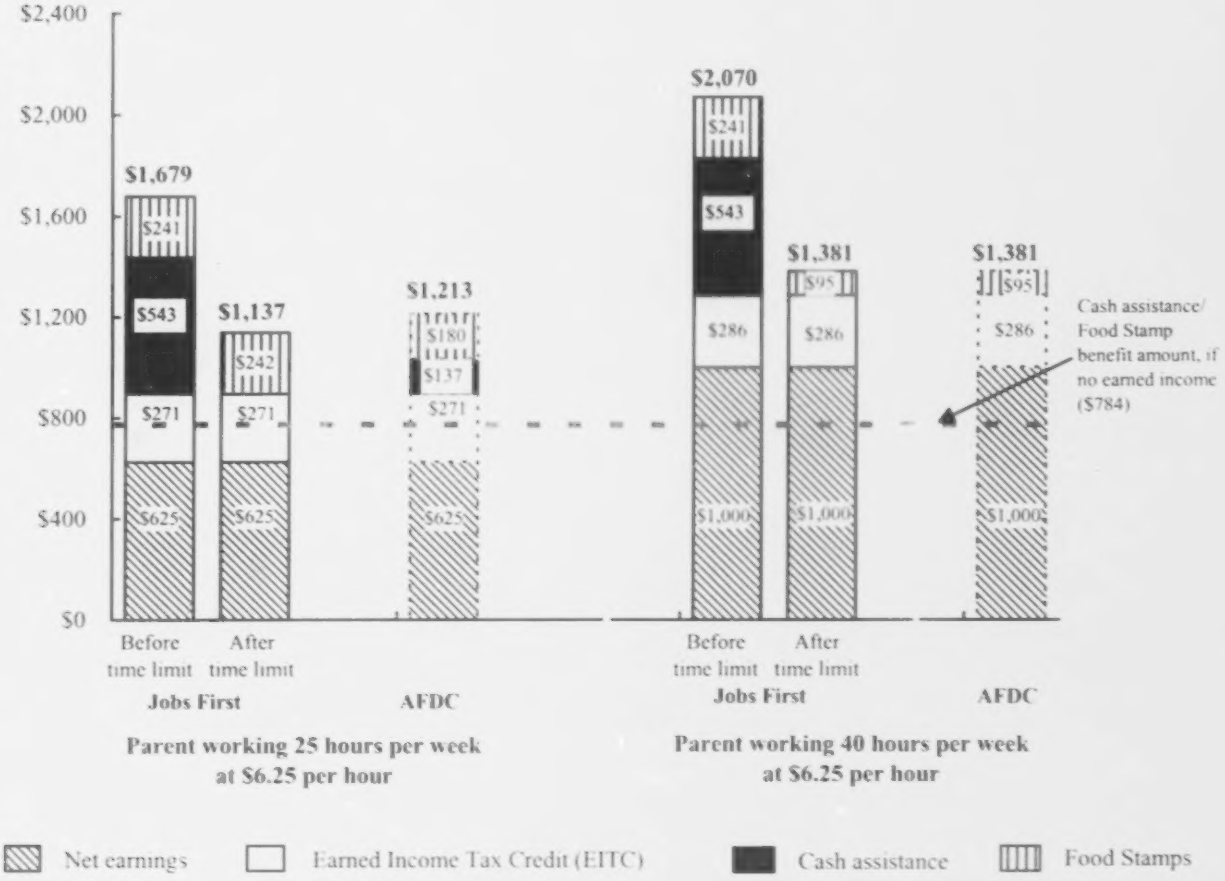
[10] Some staff also pointed out that clients who took advantage of Jobs First's higher vehicle exclusion policy to obtain a reliable car may have found, after termination, that this vehicle disqualified them from receiving Food Stamps.

Figure 4.4

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Examples of Monthly Family Income Before and After the Jobs First Time Limit for an Employed Single Parent with Two Children Whose Grant was Canceled for Income Exceeding the Payment Standard



SOURCES: MDRC calculations based on AFDC/TFA, Food Stamp, and federal and State of Connecticut income tax rules for January through June 1997.

NOTES: Calculations do not account for work-related expenses and assume the parent has no income from sources not shown (e.g., child support, SSI).

The Food Stamp calculation assumes a monthly rental expense of $366. This calculation disregards 70 percent of net income, which includes the AFDC/TFA grant but excludes a $134 standard deduction and up to $250 of excess shelter costs. For clients in the Jobs First group, all earned income is disregarded before the time limit, and 20 percent of earned income is disregarded after the time limit. For clients in the AFDC group, 20 percent of earned income is disregarded.

(continued)

Figure 4.4 (continued)

The Jobs First cash assistance calculation disregards all earned income before the time limit. The AFDC cash assistance calculation disregards $120 in earned income (in accordance with rules for the fifth through twelfth months of employment), and applies "fill-the-gap" budgeting rules.

The EITC amount reflects 1/12 of the total annual credit, although most families receive the credit in an annual lump sum.

Monthly net earnings are calculated by subtracting applicable payroll taxes from gross earnings. Federal and state income taxes do not apply at these income levels.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in the calculation of sums and differences.

If a client's benefits are terminated because she is "over income," it is possible for her to request an extension at a later date if her employment situation changes (i.e., if her earnings drop below the payment standard through no fault of her own). In interviews, some staff said that they routinely inform clients of this fact. Other workers are much less direct. For example, one worker said she tells clients: "If there are dire consequences, we're still here to help you." Another reported that "we've not been told to tell the clients they can come back. The message is, 'You've used up your 21 months.'" DSS training materials note that clients may request extensions at any point from Month 20 onward but do not emphasize that staff should remind clients of this fact when they are denied an extension. A post-time limit tracking study, currently underway in six sites, will provide information about whether these clients know that they are still eligible to receive benefits. (The results of the subsample analysis described earlier indicate that at least some clients are aware of this possibility because they returned to TFA after having been denied an extension.)

C. Determining Whether the Client Made a Good-Faith Effort

The Jobs First program stipulates that a client is assumed not to have made a good-faith effort if any one of the following conditions are true:

1. The client failed the work test and had one employment services sanction during the first 20 months; or
2. The client received two or more employment services sanctions; or
3. The client did any one of the following things during the last six months of assistance: quit a job, refused a job, was fired from a job for willful misconduct, reduced her hours of employment, or refused additional hours of employment.

In preparation for each exit interview, case maintenance workers review the client's record of participation and sanctioning. In some cases, they discuss the case with the corresponding employment services worker.

*1. **Making the determination.*** Although the definition of "good-faith effort" seems to be objective and straightforward, there are several reasons why it can be complex to implement in practice.

First, the process generally assumes that clients have made a good-faith effort unless there is direct evidence to the contrary. As discussed in Chapter 3, there were several reasons why it was difficult to carefully monitor the employment activities of some clients in the pre-time limit period. Several cases in the mini-case study that were deemed to have made a good-faith effort, for example, appeared to have had little recorded history of participation in employment services activities. In some cases, this was because the client had been employed, at least sporadically: If EMS showed earnings in the system, the case was given low priority for employment services. In other cases, it was not clear precisely what the client had been doing during her time in the program. (This history was often difficult to interpret, because many cases had been shifted from one worker to another during the 20-month period.) Nevertheless, because there were no sanctions, good-faith effort was assumed. Workers in both sites report that the vast majority of clients with income below the payment standard are determined to have made a good-faith effort.

Second, when a client reports that she is no longer employed in a job that is recorded in EMS, the worker may try to contact the employer to determine why she left the job; as noted earlier, if she quit without "good cause" within the past six months or was fired for willful misconduct, she is assumed not to have made a good-faith effort. Even if the worker talks to the client's former employer, however, it may be difficult to determine exactly why a client left a particular job and whether she had "good cause"; it appears that workers need to make fairly subjective judgments in such cases. For example, employers often report that employees are terminated for "excessive absenteeism," but the absences may be attributable to a problem that warrants a "good cause" determination.[11]

In one case that was reviewed, the worker granted a good-faith extension even though the client had recently quit a job, because the client produced a physician's statement which indicated that she was pregnant and could not lift heavy objects; this had caused the client to quit her job. In another case, a worker granted an extension when a client had quit a job after becoming homeless. Although the staff who were interviewed appeared to err on the side of granting extensions in uncertain situations, this may not be true in all cases. In one case that was included in the subsample analysis described above, the case narrative noted that the client had been denied an extension because her former employer cited excessive absenteeism as the reason she had been fired from a job; the client maintained, however, that she had missed work because "the school kept calling her in regard to her daughter." Even more difficult issues may arise when clients lose jobs during extensions, when a finding of no "good cause" could result in permanent cancellation of the client's grant.

Third, in some cases, clients are in the midst of an Individual Performance Contract when they show up for the exit interview (or must be offered an IPC at that point — for example, because it is determined that they quit a job without cause in the past six months). IPCs are offered to clients who are in danger of losing their benefits owing to lack of a good-faith effort, and typically take 30 to 60 days to complete. If an IPC is offered at this late point, the contracting agencies attempt to expedite it (see below). These clients may be granted extensions until the IPC results are available.

2. Early experiences with Individual Performance Contracts. Workers in both New Haven and Manchester have utilized this new policy. As of March 20th, 1998, there had been 782 referrals to IPC services statewide.[12]

The basic goal of an IPC is to give the client an opportunity to restore her eligibility for an extension. If a client hasn't demonstrated good-faith, an IPC may represent her last and only chance to do so. Generally, to take advantage of this voluntary option, a client must agree to complete an employability plan which includes work-related activities that conform to the Jobs First program. Clients are eligible for limited transportation and child care support while they complete an IPC.

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[11] Employers may have an incentive to report that employees quit voluntarily or were terminated for willful misconduct because this may affect the individual's eligibility for unemployment compensation and, consequently, the employer's Unemployment Compensation tax rate.

[12] According to data collected by the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies.

The original policy stipulated that IPCs would not be offered in the 21st month of assistance.[13] However, for several reasons, a client may not be properly identified as "at risk" until the 21st month. In an effort to give all "at risk" clients an opportunity to demonstrate good-faith, IPCs are currently allowed during the 21st month. The contractor that provides IPC services is supposed to "fast track" these cases, and if necessary, DSS will allow the client to complete the IPC during the extension period. If the IPC is not successfully completed, the client's extension is terminated and the client is no longer eligible for future extensions based on a good-faith effort.

IPC services are provided under the rubric of the Employment Success Program.[14] The Employment Success Program is an umbrella term for three streams of services: IPC services, emergency safety net services, and employment services for clients in their first extension period. (Emergency safety net and extension services will be described later.) DSS administers two contracts for the three programs. The extension services contract is directly with the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA). The second contract, WorkSteps, is with a partnership between the United Way and Infoline; this partnership subcontracts to CCFSA. Worksteps, which is managed through a centralized, statewide service delivery system comprised of local CCFSA member agencies, includes two components: IPC and safety net services.

When DSS identifies a client who is in danger of losing her benefits because of lack of a good-faith effort (e.g., because she has been sanctioned twice), the client's name is referred to Infoline, a statewide clearinghouse of service information. Infoline makes the initial attempt to contact the client by telephone or through the mail. Within 24 to 48 hours, Infoline refers the case to CCFSA, which provides case management services. DSS provides information about the client's employment plan and her past participation problems.

Local CCFSA case managers (primary service managers) conduct a client assessment, which includes a self-administered survey of self-esteem and coping skills, and help the client complete an IPC service plan. The contractor works with IPC clients for 30 or 60 days, depending on how much time a client has left on her time clock, and then reports back to DSS about whether the client has completed the IPC plan.

In Manchester, during the first few months of this program, the contractor was having trouble locating clients who had been referred for an IPC. Oftentimes phone numbers were no longer listed, or answering machines were not available to leave a message. After a few months, the Manchester office invited primary service managers to conduct meetings with clients in the welfare office. Now, primary service managers schedule initial meetings with clients there two days of the week, and that has proven to be an effective strategy in establishing contact with clients.

MDRC has not yet collected systematic data on outcomes for clients referred for IPCs.

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[13] UPM 8540.10, page 3, E.1

[14] Prior to November 1, 1997, there was another statewide program with the same name, the Employment Success Program. It provided employment and retention services for underemployed single-parent and two-parent households. This new Employment Success Program is different from the earlier program.

D. Determining Whether There Are Circumstances Beyond the Client's Control

If a client is deemed not to have made a good-faith effort, she still can receive an extension if she has a current situation beyond her control which affects her ability to work. Circumstances beyond someone's control include prolonged illness, a disaster such as a flood or fire, loss of housing, or domestic violence.

Workers in both sites reported they have had little experience with this policy (it is only relevant for clients who are deemed not to have made a good-faith effort, and there have been few such cases). Manchester workers noted that they have had a few cases in which there were circumstances beyond the client's control, but that these clients had made a good-faith effort to find employment (in which case the circumstances beyond control criterion is not relevant). For example, as noted earlier, one client became homeless and, because of this condition, the worker concluded that the client had "good cause" to quit a job (and thus was deemed to have made a good-faith effort). Manchester workers noted that they carefully assess whether a client has "good cause" or has made a good-faith effort, because granting a client an extension based on circumstances beyond her control may result in a lengthy regional approval process.

As shown in Figure 4.3 (discussed earlier), a few cases in the research sites were coded in EMS as having received extensions owing to circumstances beyond the client's control — but a close review of these cases suggests that most actually received the extension because they had made a good-faith effort and had income below the payment standard. In some cases, clients *were* facing circumstances that may have prevented them from working, but this would only be relevant if the client did not make a good-faith effort, and that did not appear to have been the case in these instances. (Several of these cases were among the earliest exit interviews, and it appears that some workers were uncertain about the EMS coding procedures at that point.)

E. Clients' Responses to the Exit Interview Process

MDRC has not yet conducted surveys or focus groups with clients who have attended exit interviews. Some staff reported that they have been surprised by the lack of negative responses among clients. Workers reported that most clients know what to expect and are not surprised at the outcome. A few clients have even expressed relief to be finished with welfare.

At the same time, staff report that some clients are surprised to learn at the exit interview that their earnings are measured against the payment standard instead of the poverty level. With the earned income disregard, clients could earn up to the poverty level, which is significantly greater than the payment standard. Clearly some clients did not know that their earnings would be measured against the payment standard instead of the poverty line. During the informal group discussions described in Chapter 3, one client said, "They call it the 21-month program. When you start working you have to fill out the work forms and everything, and then they say they won't cut you for a while, then you can get ahead…they also told me at the last redetermination that if you don't meet [the] poverty level then they won't cut you off your 20-month program."

The difference between the poverty level and the payment standard may have been a subtle issue that some workers didn't emphasize during conversations with participants. In addition, the policy can appear somewhat confusing, because even though clients' earnings are measured against the payment standard at the exit interview, earnings up to the poverty level are still disregarded during any extension period. This could create some confusion for clients, who may know someone who is in their first extension and earning above the payment standard (because the client found her job or increased her hours after receiving the extension), while they themselves were denied an extension because they were earning above the payment standard.

F. Clients Who Fail to Show Up for Their Exit Interview

Clients who fail to attend an exit interview cannot receive an extension. Exit interviews are typically scheduled around the middle of month 20; if a client fails to show up, she usually has several weeks to show up or contact her worker before her TFA benefits and Food Stamps are actually terminated. DSS usually sends a notice on about the 12th day of the 21st month informing the client that she failed to contact her worker and that her benefits will be canceled. However, if the client contacts her worker before the end of the 21st month, she can still qualify for an extension without any disruption in her TFA or Food Stamp benefits; for this to occur, the worker must reopen the case. If the client fails to contact the worker before Month 22 begins, the client can still request an extension, but her case is treated as if from a new applicant, and there may be an interruption in her benefits. As noted earlier, relatively few cases in the subsample analysis were canceled because the client failed to show up for an exit interview (although it is possible that some clients did not show up for the interview when it was originally scheduled).

To summarize, all benefits — TFA, Food Stamps, and Medicaid — will remain intact until the last day of the 21st month. If the client contacts her worker in time, the worker can still conduct an exit interview and there may be no disruption in benefits. However, if the client fails to contact her worker at all, TFA benefits will end, Food Stamp benefits will end, and transitional Medicaid will "kick in" only if EMS shows earnings on the client's record.

Most staff assume that clients who do not show up for their exit interviews must have income above the payment standard and know that they will not receive an extension. These clients may also assume that they are no longer eligible for Food Stamp benefits, although this may not be correct. They may also be missing an opportunity to apply for temporary rental assistance.

There is concern, however, that some clients who do not show up to exit interviews may have income below the payment standard. These clients may not fully understand the purpose of the interview: They may assume that they have reached the time limit and must leave welfare. For example, they may not know that they can receive an extension (despite the fact that the letter scheduling them for the exit interview clearly notes this), and so may not see any reason to attend the interview. DSS is currently developing a strategy to identify these clients and refer them to appropriate services.

At this point, it is impossible to determine why some clients do not show up for exit interviews. While only a few clients in the subsample analysis had their benefits canceled for failing to show up for the exit interview, most had earnings recorded in EMS during their final month of benefits (though, as noted earlier, this information may be slightly out of date). Further information on this topic will be obtained through the post-time limit tracking study mentioned earlier.

IV. Clients Who Receive Extensions

Clients who are granted extensions are required to participate in employment services. The basic goal of these services is to help clients increase their earnings, to either match or go above the level of the payment standard. In doing so, caseworkers may help clients find better jobs or increase their hours. If a client does not comply with any part of their employment program during the extension period, they are terminated from TFA and are generally not eligible for further extensions.

As mentioned earlier, the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies has a statewide contract to deliver extension services. However, the contract isn't large enough to cover all extension clients, so both research sites have supplemented the statewide contract. Both offices deliver some extension services in-house by referring clients to DSS employment services workers. In addition, New Haven has established an extension services contract with a local employment services provider.

With the large volume of clients requiring extension services, the two sites are dividing up referrals based on the needs of each client. In New Haven, underemployed clients are typically referred to one of the contractors, while unemployed clients work directly with an employment services worker and may be referred to short-term training or other activities. Clients referred to the CCFSA contractor are scheduled for a home visit and assessment and then work one-on-one with a case manager. Typically, the contractor works with the client for three to four months, but will close the case earlier and report back to DSS if a client refuses services (she must sign a form indicating this); can't be located after three attempted home visits and a certified letter; or is working 40 hours per week.

The contractor staff report that they have been able to locate virtually all of the clients referred to them, but that it can be difficult to devise strategies for increasing a client's hours of employment. Staff may talk to the client's employer, but many companies do not have full-time jobs available. It is too early to say anything definitive about the success of extension services.

In Manchester, clients are referred to the statewide contractor if they have had limited success with their employment plan and are unemployed or underemployed. In addition, all clients with significant barriers to employment are referred to the contractor. If a client has fewer work-related barriers, the client is referred to a DSS employment services worker.

In Manchester, an extension client referred to a DSS employment services worker is required to follow an employability plan. In most cases, the plan includes four weeks of independent job search; if the client does not have a job at the end of four weeks, she is expected to do volunteer work. For the client, the goal of the employability plan is to find work that will "earn" her off welfare without an additional extension (i.e., a job paying at least $90 above the payment standard). The client is required to submit job search logs every week. As noted earlier, clients were supposed to submit the same job search logs in early 1996, when Jobs First began; at that time, however, few clients submitted the logs, because there was no apparent penalty for not doing so. This time, Manchester workers report that clients are more diligent about submitting the logs, because they know that they could be sanctioned if they don't. And if clients are sanctioned during an extension period, their TFA benefits will be terminated and they may never be able to receive TFA benefits again.

DSS employment services staff in both sites are making an effort to increase the level of monitoring for clients in extension status. In Manchester, clients who are referred to DSS employment services workers are expected to have weekly contact with their workers through their job search logs. In New Haven, some pairs of case maintenance and employment services workers are collaborating to ensure that clients are carefully monitored. When MDRC conducted its last site visit, workers reported that few clients had been "sanctioned off" during an extension (although the analysis cited earlier in this chapter found a few such cases). No clients had reached the end of their first extension when the data for this report were collected.

V. Clients Who Do Not Receive Extensions

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of cases that have reached the time limit have followed one of two paths: Clients were denied an extension because they had income over the payment standard, or they were granted an extension because they had income under the payment standard and were deemed to have made a good-faith effort to find employment. Thus, clients who do not receive an extension generally have income over the payment standard. Throughout the state, only a small number of clients have been denied an extension even though their income is *under* the payment standard (145 clients as of March 20, 1998).[15] These clients were deemed not to have made a good-faith effort to find employment, and they were referred to emergency safety net services. (Clients who did not show up for exit interviews may have had income below the payment standard but were not referred to safety net services.)

A. Clients with Income Below the Payment Standard

Safety net services include food, shelter, clothing, vouchers for emergency needs, referrals, employment assistance, assessment, case management, and counseling. Clients in safety net services can return to welfare only if they qualify for an exemption or are subject to circumstances beyond their control.

Connecticut is one of the first states in the country to administer a statewide program to assist clients whose benefits are terminated at the end of a time limit. The safety net program is not intended to become an entitlement program, and it is supposed to rely on resources that already exist within the community.

Like IPC services, safety net services are provided through a statewide, centralized service delivery system managed by the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies. Again, Infoline attempts to contact the client first, conducts an initial screening, and makes immediate telephone referrals. Then the client is referred to the local safety net provider.

Once the client is contacted, the safety net provider conducts a home visit. Staff report that safety net clients are in a variety of situations. Some have strong family support, while others do not. Several have physical or mental problems that might have qualified them for an exemption, or even for SSI, but they have not followed through on the required application processes. The safety net provider will assist them with the necessary steps.

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[15] According to data collected by the Connecticut Council of Family Services Agencies.

As with Individual Performance Contracts, the cornerstone of the safety net is employment services. During the first home visit, safety net providers conduct an employment assessment to determine each client's job skills, potential barriers, and capacity for employment. This assessment process serves as the basis for each client's employability and service plan. Through frequent contact (two to three phone calls and/or home visits per week, depending on the needs of the client)[16], case managers help clients develop specific, concrete strategies to increase their earnings or, if they're not working, get a job.

In addition, safety net providers can meet clients' immediate needs by issuing vouchers for rental assistance, utility assistance, food, and clothing. There is no monetary limit with respect to rental assistance; it depends upon what the client needs. Safety net providers will pay a client's rent for three full months and will pay part of the rent for another three months. For utility assistance, there are no monetary limits or time restrictions. Food vouchers are issued in $25 increments; they are honored by large, local supermarket chains. In addition, each primary service provider carries bags of nonperishable food for immediate use. (The New Haven safety net provider reported that staff will bring bags of clothing as well as nonperishable food in their cars when they make a home visit.) In some cases, if a client lacks stable housing, the safety net provider will arrange for temporary housing in a local shelter. As a last resort, the provider may temporarily house a client in a motel. In these cases, if a client lacks kitchen facilities, the provider can issue food vouchers to restaurant chains like McDonald's, Burger King, or KFC.

As mentioned previously, safety net clients cannot "redeem" good-faith and can only return to TFA assistance through some other mechanism, like qualifying for an exemption or being subject to circumstances beyond their control. Safety net clients appear to be utilizing these two mechanisms; the safety net provider reported that several safety net clients have already returned to TFA assistance through one of these options. The majority of safety net clients, however, may never be able to receive TFA assistance again. If so, it is possible that some will need emergency safety net assistance, perhaps on and off, for quite some time. At this point, safety net providers are not sure when, if ever, their services to these clients will end.

MDRC will continue to study the implementation of the safety net component over time.

B. Clients with Income Above the Payment Standard

Clients who were denied an extension because they earn at or above the payment standard are eligible for the Time Limited Rental Assistance Program (TLRAP). It is intended to soften the blow from the loss of assistance, which for some families may be significant because their Food Stamps probably went down as well.

TLRAP is a monthly rental assistance payment that goes directly to the landlord. To be eligible, clients cannot be living in public or subsidized (Section 8) housing and must be living in privately owned rental housing. TLRAP is contracted out to the same agencies that are administering the existing RAP program.[17] MDRC has not done a full analysis on the participation rates of TLRAP, nor has MDRC analyzed the effectiveness of this program.

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[16] For particularly "needy" cases, the safety net provider has contact with the client on a daily basis.

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[17] The Rental Assistance Program is a certificate program providing rental subsidies to low-income families residing in rental housing. Families whose income does not exceed 60 percent and elderly or disabled individuals whose income does not exceed 50 percent of the state median income are eligible to participate in the program. The family with a RAP certificate pays the landlord either 20 percent of its gross monthly income or 40 percent of its adjusted monthly income minus a utility allowance, whichever is greater.

Appendix

Appendix Table 1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Sample Members' Knowledge of Key Features of Jobs First, by Research Group and Site

	Manchester		New Haven	
Knowledge and Awareness (%)	Jobs First Group	AFDC Group	Jobs First Group	AFDC Group
Awareness of program features				
There is a time limit on how long I can receive AFDC/TFA	81.1	30.0	74.4	20.6
If I have a job, I can keep all of the money from my job and my AFDC/TFA check as long as I am earning below the poverty line	66.7	23.3	65.1	14.7
Sample size	37	30	44	35
Awareness of the time limit				
Among those who said they had a time limit, percentage who heard about time limit from:[a]				
Welfare office/staff at welfare office	83.3	66.7	75.0	71.4
Family/friends	0.0	11.1	3.1	0.0
Letter from the state	20.0	22.2	21.9	14.3
TV/newspaper/radio	6.7	11.1	3.1	0.0
Other	3.3	0.0	6.3	14.3
Assumed length of time limit				
21 months	90.0	44.4	90.3	16.7
24 months	6.7	11.1	0.0	0.0
Another amount	3.3	33.3	9.7	50.0
Don't know	0.0	11.1	0.0	33.3
Sample size	30	9	32	7

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on data from a telephone survey of sample members randomly assigned in November and December 1996. Respondents were interviewed three to six months after their random assignment date.

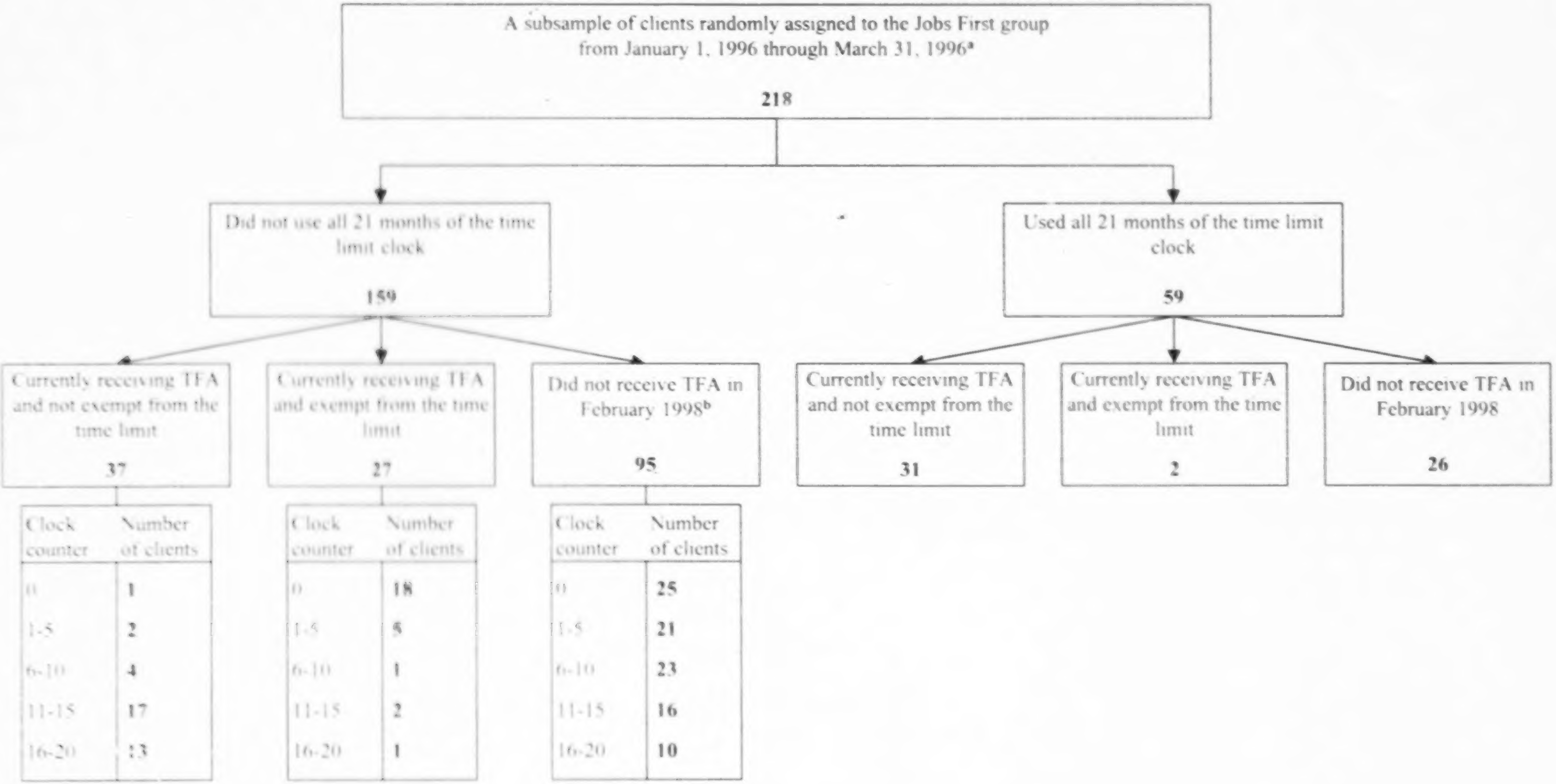
NOTES: People who did not respond to a particular item are excluded from the calculations; the non-response rates for individual items ranged from 0.0 to 11.1 percent. The latter rate is only for the New Haven AFDC group members who said they had a time limit.

[a] Because respondents could give more than one response, the totals sum to more than 100 percent.

Appendix Figure 1

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Status in February 1998 of Single-Parent Jobs First Group Members Randomly Assigned from January 1996 through March 1996


A subsample of clients randomly assigned to the Jobs First group from January 1, 1996 through March 31, 1996[a]
218
Did not use all 21 months of the time limit clock
159
Used all 21 months of the time limit clock
59
Currently receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit
37
Currently receiving TFA and exempt from the time limit
27
Did not receive TFA in February 1998[b]
95
Currently receiving TFA and not exempt from the time limit
31
Currently receiving TFA and exempt from the time limit
2
Did not receive TFA in February 1998
26

Clock counter	Number of clients
0	1
1-5	2
6-10	4
11-15	17
16-20	13

Clock counter	Number of clients
0	18
1-5	5
6-10	1
11-15	2
16-20	1

Clock counter	Number of clients
0	25
1-5	21
6-10	23
11-15	16
16-20	10

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Connecticut Eligibility Management System (EMS) data.

NOTES: The subsample is 30.7 percent of all clients randomly assigned to the Jobs First group during this period.

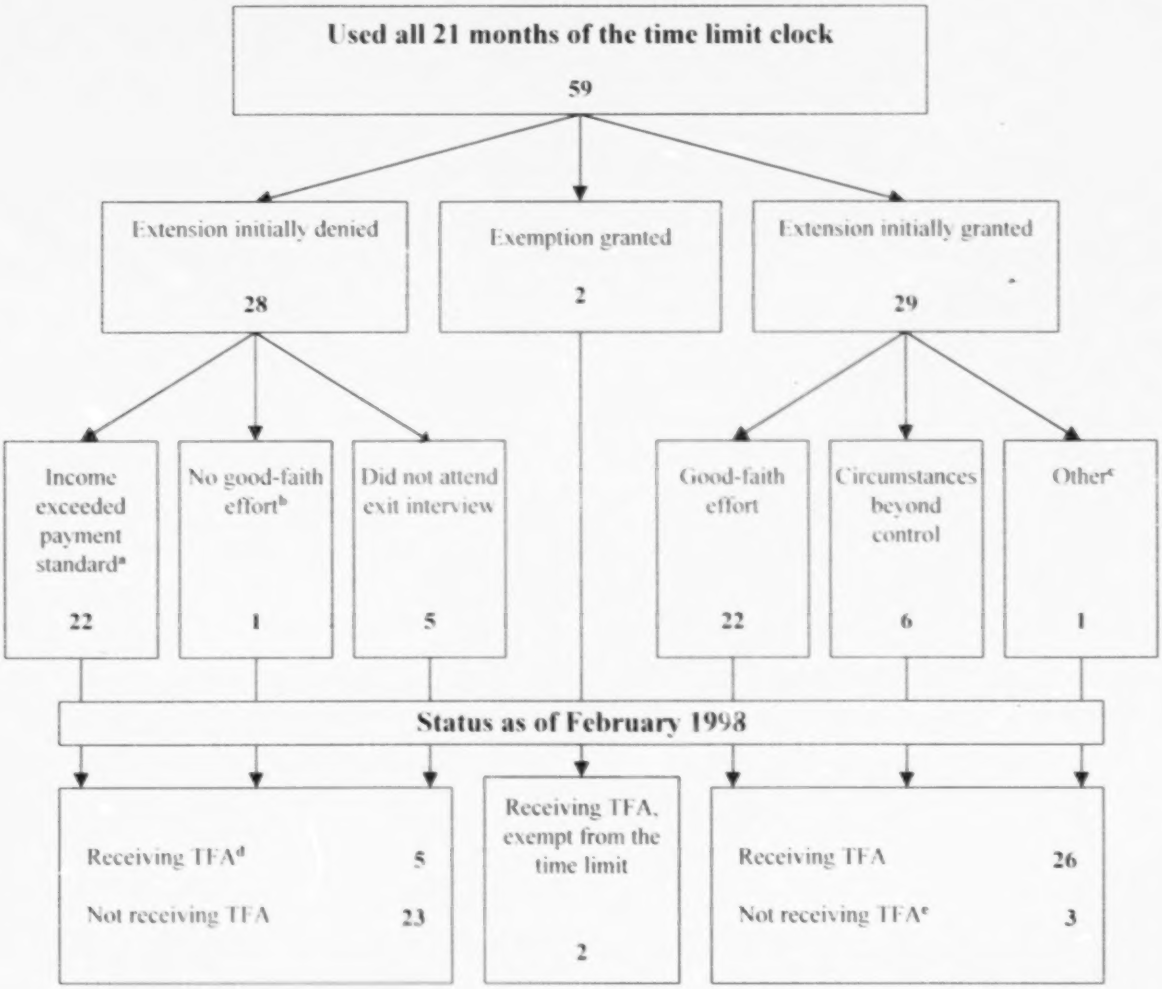
[a] Two sample members were dropped because they were erroneously treated as members of the AFDC group.

[b] Two cases in this category attended exit interviews in Month 20 and were found to have income over the federal poverty level, making them ineligible for TFA. Both cases were canceled after Month 20.

Appendix Figure 2

Connecticut's Jobs First Program

Status of Single-Parent Jobs First Group Members Randomly Assigned from January 1996 through March 1996 Who Had Reached the Jobs First Time Limit as of February 1998


Used all 21 months of the time limit clock
59
Extension initially denied
28
Exemption granted
2
Extension initially granted
29
Income exceeded payment standard[a]
22
No good-faith effort[b]
1
Did not attend exit interview
5
Good-faith effort
22
Circumstances beyond control
6
Other[c]
1
Status as of February 1998
Receiving TFA[d] 5
Not receiving TFA 23
Receiving TFA, exempt from the time limit
2
Receiving TFA 26
Not receiving TFA[e] 3

SOURCE: MDRC calculations from Connecticut Eligibility Management System (EMS) data.

NOTES: The sample for this figure includes all members of the subsample described in Appendix Figure 1 who had used all 21 months by February 1998.

[a] Several of the cases in this category were coded in EMS as not requesting an extension. However, the case narrative clearly indicated that the client attended the exit interview and was found to be "over income." One client in this category did not attend an exit interview because she was working; her worker determined her income during a telephone interview.

[b] The one client in this category was initially denied an extension because she failed to show up for an exit interview. She applied for an extension a few days after the end of Month 21 and was denied for lack of good-faith effort.

[c] No extension reason was coded for this case.

[d] These five cases were off TFA for one to three months. Three were initially denied extensions on account of income over the payment standard and were later granted extensions for good-faith effort (i.e., after their income dropped). One was denied initially for income over the payment standard and was then granted an extension for circumstances beyond control. The fifth case was denied for not showing up at her exit interview and then granted an extension for good-faith effort.

[e] Two of these three cases were canceled for failing to comply with employment services mandates during the extension; the other became ineligible for TFA.

Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Reforming Welfare and Making Work Pay

ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities

A multifaceted effort to assist states and localities in designing and implementing their welfare reform programs. The project includes a series of "how-to" guides, conferences, briefings, and customized, in-depth technical assistance.

After AFDC: Welfare-to-Work Choices and Challenges for States. 1997. Dan Bloom.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Time Limits

Florida's Family Transition Program

An evaluation of Florida's initial time-limited welfare program, which includes services, requirements, and financial work incentives intended to reduce long-term welfare receipt and help welfare recipients find and keep jobs.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Early Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1997. Dan Bloom, James J. Kemple, Robin Rogers-Dillon.

The Family Transition Program: Implementation and Interim Impacts of Florida's Initial Time-Limited Welfare Program. 1998. Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, James J. Kemple, Nandita Verma.

Cross-State Study of Time-Limited Welfare

An examination of the implementation of some of the first state-initiated time-limited welfare programs.

Implementing Time-Limited Welfare: Early Experiences in Three States. 1995. Dan Bloom, David Butler.

The View from the Field: As Time Limits Approach, Welfare Recipients and Staff Talk About Their Attitudes and Expectations. 1997. Amy Brown, Dan Bloom, David Butler.

Financial Incentives

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

MFIP: An Early Report on Minnesota's Approach to Welfare Reform. 1995. Virginia Knox, Amy Brown, Winston Lin.

Making Welfare Work and Work Pay: Implementation and 18-Month Impacts of the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 1997. Cynthia Miller, Virginia Knox, Patricia Auspos, Jo Anna Hunter-Manns, Alan Orenstein.

New Hope Project

A test of a community-based, work-focused antipoverty program and welfare alternative operating in Milwaukee.

The New Hope Offer: Participants in the New Hope Demonstration Discuss Work, Family, and Self-Sufficiency. 1996. Dudley Benoit.

Creating New Hope: Implementation of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare. 1997. Thomas Brock, Fred Doolittle, Veronica Fellerath, Michael Wiseman.

Who Got New Hope? 1997. Michael Wiseman.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients. Reports on the Self-Sufficiency Project are available from: Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), 275 Slater St., Suite 900, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H9, Canada. Tel.: 613-237-4311; Fax: 613-237-5045. In the United States, the reports are also available from MDRC.

Creating an Alternative to Welfare: First-Year Findings on the Implementation, Welfare Impacts, and Costs of the Self-Sufficiency Project (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation [SRDC]). 1995. Tod Mijanovich, David Long.

The Struggle for Self-Sufficiency: Participants in the Self-Sufficiency Project Talk About Work, Welfare, and Their Futures (SRDC). 1995. Wendy Bancroft, Sheila Currie Vernon.

Do Financial Incentives Encourage Welfare Recipients to Work? Initial 18-Month Findings from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1996. David Card, Philip K. Robins.

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org).

When Work Pays Better Than Welfare: A Summary of the Self-Sufficiency Project's Implementation, Focus Group, and Initial 18-Month Impact Reports (SRDC). 1996.

How Important Are "Entry Effects" in Financial Incentive Programs for Welfare Recipients? Experimental Evidence from the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1997. David Card, Philip K. Robins, Winston Lin.

Do Work Incentives Have Unintended Consequences? Measuring "Entry Effects" in the Self-Sufficiency Project (SRDC). 1998. Gordon Berlin, Wendy Bancroft, David Card, Winston Lin, Philip K. Robins.

Mandatory Welfare Employment Programs

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

A large-scale study (formerly known as the JOBS Evaluation) of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Adult Education for People on AFDC: A Synthesis of Research (U.S. Department of Education [ED]/U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS]). 1995. Edward Pauly.

Early Findings on Program Impacts in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1995. Stephen Freedman, Daniel Friedlander.

Five Years After: The Long-Term Effects of Welfare-to-Work Programs (Russell Sage Foundation). 1995. Daniel Friedlander, Gary Burtless.

Monthly Participation Rates in Three Sites and Factors Affecting Participation Levels in Welfare-to-Work Programs (HHS/ED). 1995. Gayle Hamilton.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Evaluating Two Welfare-to-Work Program Approaches: Two-Year Findings on the Labor Force Attachment and Human Capital Development Programs in Three Sites (HHS/ED). 1997. Gayle Hamilton, Thomas Brock, Mary Farrell, Daniel Friedlander, Kristen Harknett.

Work First: How to Implement an Employment-Focused Approach to Welfare Reform. 1997. Amy Brown.

Los Angeles's Jobs-First GAIN Program

An evaluation of Los Angeles's refocused GAIN (welfare-to-work) program, which emphasizes rapid employment. This is the first in-depth study of a full-scale "work first" program in one of the nation's largest urban areas.

Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients. 1997. Evan Weissman.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert C. Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Three-Year Impacts of Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1996. David Long, Judith M. Gueron, Robert G. Wood, Rebecca Fisher, Veronica Fellerath.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

Focusing on Fathers

Parents' Fair Share Demonstration

A demonstration for unemployed noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare. PFS aims to improve the men's employment and earnings, reduce child poverty by increasing child support payments, and assist the fathers in playing a broader constructive role in their children's lives.

Low-Income Parents and the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. 1996. Earl Johnson, Fred Doolittle.

Working with Low-Income Cases: Lessons for the Child Support Enforcement System from Parents' Fair Share. 1998. Fred Doolittle, Suzanne Lynn.

Other

Can They All Work? A Study of the Employment Potential of Welfare Recipients in a Welfare-to-Work Program. 1995. James A. Riccio, Stephen Freedman.

Florida's Project Independence: Benefits, Costs, and Two-Year Impacts of Florida's JOBS Program. 1995. James J. Kemple, Daniel Friedlander, Veronica Fellerath.

From Welfare to Work Among Lone Parents in Britain: Lessons for America. 1996. James A. Riccio.

Employment and Community Initiatives

Jobs-Plus Initiative

A multi-site effort to greatly increase employment among public housing residents.

A Research Framework for Evaluating Jobs-Plus, a Saturation and Place-Based Employment Initiative for Public Housing Residents. 1998. James A. Riccio.

Section 3 Public Housing Study

An examination of the effectiveness of Section 3 of the 1968 Housing and Urban Development Act in affording employment opportunities for public housing residents.

Lessons from the Field on the Implementation of Section 3 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development). 1996. Maxine Bailey, Suzanne Lynn.

Connections to Work Project

A study of local efforts to increase competition in the choice of providers of employment services for welfare recipients and other low-income populations. The project also provides assistance to cutting-edge local initiatives aimed at helping such people access and secure jobs.

Tulsa's IndEx Program: A Business-Led Initiative for Welfare Reform and Economic Development. 1997. Maria Buck.

Washington Works: Sustaining a Vision of Welfare Reform Based on Personal Change, Work Preparation, and Employer Involvement. 1998. Susan Gooden.

Canada's Earnings Supplement Project

A test of an innovative financial incentive intended to expedite the reemployment of displaced workers and encourage full-year work by seasonal or part-year workers, thereby also reducing receipt of Unemployment Insurance.

Implementing the Earnings Supplement Project: A Test of a Re-employment Incentive (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation). 1997. Howard Bloom, Barbara Fink, Susanna Lui-Gurr, Wendy Bancroft, Doug Tattrie.

Education Reform

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Program Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel A. Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this 10-site study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James J. Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James J. Kemple.

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